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Friday, 17 October 2003, 3 p.m.
New York

President: The Hon. Julian R. Hunte ..... (Saint Lucia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Da Fonseca (Cape Verde), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations

Letter dated 16 October 2003 from the Secretary-General to the President of the General Assembly (A/58/440)

The Acting President: Before proceeding to the items for this meeting, I should like to invite the attention of the General Assembly to document A/58/440. It contains a letter from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly, in which he informs the Assembly that 12 Member States are in arrears in the payment of their financial contributions to the United Nations under the terms of Article 19 of the Charter.

I should like to remind delegations that, under Article 19 of the Charter, a Member of the United Nations which is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Organization shall have no vote in the General Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of the information contained in document A/58/440?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 56 (*continued*)

Question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters

Mr. Kilo-Abi (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): With regard to the interaction between agenda item 11 and agenda item 56, my delegation felt that the two items could be taken up together.

Based on that understanding, the delegation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is grateful to Ambassador John Negroponte, Permanent Representative of the United States of America and current President of the Security Council, for the quality of the presentation of his report, which has received my delegation's full attention. After having carefully studied the report of the Security Council submitted to us, which covers the period from 1 August 2002 to 31 July 2003, my delegation appreciates the sharp increase in the quality of the document, which describes the work tackled by this central organ of the United Nations that is responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security.

My delegation has noted that the concerns of the Security Council include, among others, the situation in the Middle East, the situation in certain European and Asian countries, the Kimberley Process, terrorism and the issue of peace in Africa, especially the

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situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, my country. In that connection, I wish to recall that, in commending the Security Council's efforts to restore peace to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, His Excellency the President of the Republic, Major-General Joseph Kabila, explicitly stated the following to the Assembly on 24 September 2003:

> "The Congolese people continue to be grateful to the United Nations system for the assistance that it gave it through the United Nation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Interim Emergency Multinational Force deployed in Bunia and especially for strengthening the peacekeeping mandate of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo". (*A/58/PV.10, p. 14*)

To accommodate all of the challenges facing our country, where everything has to be rebuilt in this post-conflict period, the Democratic Republic of the Congo trusts that the international community will help in the transition now under way — the ultimate purpose of which is to organize free, transparent and democratic elections — by establishing a United Nations fund to address the immeasurable damage done to our country by several years of war and an international criminal tribunal for the Democratic Republic of the Congo to prosecute crimes of genocide and crimes against humanity, including rape used as a weapon of war and massive violations of human rights.

The Security Council has also focused on one issue of enormous concern to the entire human race. I refer to terrorism, an evil that gratuitously sows horror and devastation. In the face of this horrendous scourge, our countries must mobilize and put up a common front in order to terrorize the terrorism by stifling it in its innermost refuges. Accordingly, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, pursuant to resolution 1373 (2001), has established a national committee to coordinate the campaign against international terrorism and fully supports the work of the Counter-Terrorism Committee.

The maintenance of international peace and security, the development of friendly relations among States and the achievement of international cooperation are the founding principles of the United Nations. My delegation believes that the fulfilment of this noble mission requires, inter alia, the recognition of the sovereign equality of States, the peaceful settlement of disputes and the non-use or threat of use of force. However, international events have defied and continue to frustrate the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

As we all know, the world situation is currently prey to the accumulation of the most sophisticated nuclear and other weapons; the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons; the noxious existence of anti-personnel landmines; the retreat of multilateralism on all fronts; the division of our planet into two parts, that of the poor and that of the rich and opulent; and the emergence of transnational crime and blind terrorism.

Faced with this truly alarming situation, my delegation believes that we must devise a plan to reform the system for the maintenance of international peace and security, focusing specifically on strengthening our capacity for collective action and the credibility of the Security Council. This will require, first, a revision of the Council's decision-making process and, secondly, an increase in its membership on the basis of equitable geographical representation, for instance by reserving one non-permanent seat for each of the regional continental groupings. It has been noted in this regard that regional and subregional organizations are increasingly being called on to help in the settlement of local conflicts. Thirdly, the Security Council must reconsider and further strengthen its relationship with the General Assembly. Fourthly, there must be greater cooperation with regional and subregional organizations in the area of preventive diplomacy.

My country supports the Secretary-General's proposal for the establishment of a panel of eminent personalities to make specific suggestions on Security Council reform. It is our ardent hope that such a worthy think tank can arrive at its conclusions as soon as possible. If it is to be dynamic and, above all, useful, the reform should not be directed against any particular State or group of member States. On the contrary, it must help to ensure an overall multilateral structure to which peoples and nations can come for sustenance and renewal.

Mr. Gallegos Chiriboga (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to address the main elements in the debate on the issue before us, which I addressed previously when we considered the report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization.

Security Council reform has been of concern to Ecuador for a number of years and is an issue on which we have participated in extensive consultations. My delegation has noted that the Security Council should be adapted to meet contemporary challenges, which are exceedingly unlike those that led to its creation after the Second World War more than 50 years ago. The world in which we live is different from that of 1945. Today, problems are not only intergovernmental. We are facing new transnational perils, such as international terrorism, that require vigorous and effective international coordination. We are all in the same boat — the problem belongs to everyone.

The Open-ended Working Group on Security Council reform established 10 years ago has made no significant progress. The initiative of creating that Working Group has allowed us to debate reform and, regrettably, to recognize that there has been no agreement among States, despite the fact that the large majority of leaders have affirmed the need for a more democratic and transparent Security Council. Moreover, the world is calling for a greater understanding of public issues at the global level and the United Nations cannot close its ears.

In this Hall, we have debated the desirability of allowing the Working Group to continue its work, in view of the results achieved to date. We need to ask ourselves why, in spite of the intelligent guidance and efforts of many delegations, fundamental agreement has not been achieved.

The reform of the Security Council cannot be achieved without the political resolve of all those present here. It is through a reform of the entire international system that we will be able to meet the demands of the international community. Reform of the Council has to involve the requisite reform of the United Nations Charter, and only in this way will we find an international structure in which the Organization will meet the needs and expectations of our peoples.

Increasing the number of the members of the Security Council is just a step in the right direction, but it is not in itself enough. We need to find new mechanisms that will make the Security Council more effective in fulfilling its obligation and mandates. At the same time, we need to ensure that the resolutions adopted by the Security Council are implemented by the entire international community.

Reform also has to tackle a new definition of the use of the power and exercise of the veto. Ecuador takes the view that we should not have a power of veto in an Organization based on pluralism and democracy, where all States are equal. When the Organization was created, this was a necessary concession, but it is no longer so. The use of the veto or the threat of its use has led to uses of power that are worrisome, in particular when we encounter what non-permanent members refer to as the "silent veto". Therefore we need to eliminate the use of the veto.

We, the majority of the countries of the world, are asking that reform be in accordance with the vision of world leaders and that it be carried out with the conviction that we must change the structures of an international architecture that no longer corresponds to the needs and expectations of human beings on this planet.

A few days ago, I expressed my belief that we must bring interests and realities closer together to achieve reform. It is vital that we should try to achieve the consensuses that will guarantee effectiveness in the international system's pursuit of peace. The initiative of the Secretary-General to set up a panel of eminent persons is extremely positive, but it could, after a year of work, end up in the same situation we are in today, immobilized owing to a lack of agreement among the Members of the General Assembly.

My country and my delegation pledge to cooperate with you, Sir, and to make a dedicated effort to try to devise the structural reform that we feel is essential and is the only way to establish a more democratic and equitable international community.

Mrs. Londoño (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): The question of equitable representation on the Security Council and an increase in its membership and related issues takes us back to the very origins of the Organization, when countries such as Colombia expressed our firm opposition to the adoption of a veto power, since we thought it was anti-democratic.

As the years have passed, the difficulties that have arisen time and again impeding the Security Council from taking the necessary measures to maintain international peace and security have shown us that we are right to oppose the veto. Now, it is increasingly evident that we must find the appropriate mechanisms to achieve an equitable representation on the Security Council.

The world landscape is quite different from that which existed when the San Francisco Charter was adopted. Alliances have been reformulated and many new developing States have come forward to demand, with good reason, representation in the Council proportionate to the current importance of the developing world in the new world landscape.

Colombia takes the view that reform, working methods and the question of the veto constitute a single whole. These are issues that need to be resolved in a comprehensive and simultaneous fashion. Through a clear and express mandate from the General Assembly, the Working Group has the competence to decide on expansion as well as on reform of the working methods of the Security Council. In that working group, Colombia has restated its historical rejection of the use of veto, because we regard it as an anti-democratic and, currently, anachronistic institution. If we cannot get rid of the veto entirely, we believe that its use should be restricted to activities under chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.

We have also proposed that the expansion of the Council should address the principles of equitable geographical distribution and sovereign equality of States. We believe that it is appropriate and, in light of recent events, urgent to increase the number of seats in proportion to the membership. Since, to date, we have not achieved any agreement on expansion in the category of permanent members, we believe that, for now, it is possible to continue only on the question of non-permanent members.

My country is aware of the fact that there are high-level political barriers to accomplishing, in the short or long term, the work entrusted to us, but we must not fail. We must continue to pursue these issues and to make progress, as we have been doing and as has been evidenced. Although the results have not been as impressive as we would have wished, it is a fact that there have been improvements in the working methods of the Council, in particular with respect to its transparency.

Changing the structure of the Security Council means reviewing the whole system enshrined in the United Nations Charter. This was the view of the Working Group, which carried its difficult work with dedication and responsibility under the wise guidance of the most recent Presidents of the General Assembly. We have full confidence in the ability and leadership of the new President of the Assembly to continue this important work.

Colombia reaffirms its readiness to continue trying to make progress in this forum, which it regards as the most appropriate context for such work. We welcome the setting up of the high-level panel of eminent persons by the Secretary-General. We feel that their recommendations will be a valuable contribution to the Working Group's work and to the whole of the work of the United Nations as it reviews the need for reform and modernization.

Colombia notes that in 1999 the Working Group reached the conclusion that an increase in the membership of the Security Council would necessarily involve consideration of the issue of the veto, the decision-making process, effectiveness and transparency in the Council. For this reason, the approach needs to be comprehensive. Any change in the structure of the Council must take into account its ability to make decisions effectively and with agility. This is one of the essential elements of the effective operation of multilateralism demanded by the global community. The United Nations is called upon to continue to play a central role in this multilateralism.

Mr. Mubarez (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): Perhaps one of the most optimistic matters that the General Assembly is dealing with is the unprecedented importance given to the issue of reform of the Organization. The underlying reason is the urgent need for the United Nations to assume responsibility for eliminating hotbeds of tension around the world, given the failure of the Security Council to deal with those issues relating to international peace and security. Such realities are closely bound up with the work of the Council and lend special importance to this item on our agenda.

Reforming the Security Council is not a new idea. It is a main element in the desired reforms that have been dictated by rapid developments in international relations.

It is hard to imagine that a mechanism designed in 1945 can still be relevant in the twenty-first century without taking into account the new realities and without reforming it. It needs to be updated, hence the need for the Council to review its decision-making process and the need for the Working Group, which was set up by the General Assembly and which has presented a number of proposals now before us.

This year's report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/58/1) indicated that the rapid changes in today's world — for example, the war in Iraq — have severely tested the principle of collective security and the resilience of the Organization. The repercussions of the Iraq war underscore the dangers of current divisions between the influential Powers within the Security Council and point to the need for the reforms necessary to guarantee a minimum of global harmony in decision-making. This is needed if the Council is to regain its credibility and if there is to be political and legal force behind its binding decisions.

The decisions of the Security Council and the right of veto have called into question the Council's credibility in general and its decision-making process in particular. In our view, that process is anachronistic. Hence the concern of the Working Group, which has offered a number of recommendations — including the interesting and valuable proposals put forward by the delegation of Malaysia — aimed at improving the Council's working methods. Reform needs to be comprehensive, involving more than the expansion of the membership. The voting process needs also to be addressed, within a specific and practical context.

We have been discussing this for a decade now, and we have failed to reach agreement. We have been receptive to any opinions and proposals that might result in adequate Security Council reform that is acceptable to its members, but such reform must be comprehensive and integrated so that it includes equitable geographical representation, transparency, the principle of the sovereign equality of all nations and democracy in the Council's working methods. We and the rest of the Arab Group have always striven to conform to the provisions of the Charter. These oblige us, in expanding the Council, to ensure equitable geographical representation and to include States that have shown particular interest in and have contributed to international peace and security, such as Japan and Germany.

In conclusion, we believe that the credibility and effectiveness of the Council depend on the extent of reform aimed at improving its transparency and ensuring democracy in its decision-making process. We hope that the major Western members of the Council will shoulder their responsibilities in the area of reform, since those States base themselves on democracy and good governance. At the same time, we must ensure development for all of humanity.

Mr. Hiraj (Pakistan): I am confident that, under the skilful stewardship of Ambassador Hunte, this House will have a fruitful debate on the question of expansion of the Security Council and its working methods. We look forward to working with him in the Open-ended Working Group established for that purpose. Our objective must be the development of a transparent, democratic and effective Security Council that enjoys the support and confidence of the membership of the United Nations.

There is obviously a need to make the Security Council more representative. The membership of the United Nations has increased from 112 in 1963 — when the Council was last expanded — to 191 today. The composition of the Security Council must be expanded, principally to reflect the larger membership of the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. With few exceptions, those new Members wish to acquire not privileges, but merely representation on the Security Council as non-permanent members.

We have completed 10 years of debate on this very important question. We have heard voices of frustration over the slow progress in the Working Group. The reason for the deadlock in the Working Group is the demand of a few countries to acquire the unequal status of permanent members of the Security Council. The majority of the United Nations would not like to repeat the mistake of 1945, when a few countries decided how the Council should be structured and that the permanent members should enjoy privileges which erode the fundamental principle of sovereign equality. There was no consensus on the issue in 1945; there is even less today.

Unfortunately, there are a few countries which appear to believe that the only yardstick by which progress on Security Council reform — including on expansion — can be measured is the achievement of their ambition to become permanent members of the Council. It is from that perspective alone that they would like to judge the outcome of this whole exercise. Their desire to seek permanent status on the Security Council is not motivated by altruistic or noble sentiments. The United Nations was created on the basis of the sovereign equity of States. In the twenty-first century, the General Assembly cannot be expected

to bestow special privileges on some while denying those privileges to the vast majority of nations. There is no quick fix for the new aspirants — or for those hanging on to their coattails — to find a place in the "executive club". The decade-old debate has also made evident that countries which aspire to permanent-member status do not enjoy support or confidence even in their own regions.

The following points summarize Pakistan's position on expansion of the Security Council. We firmly believe that the objective of reform and expansion of the Security Council should be to promote greater democracy, participation, transparency and accountability in the work of the Council. Pakistan is against any increase in the permanent membership of the Security Council, as that would serve to accommodate the interests of a few countries only and, conversely, would alienate the small and medium-sized countries, which constitute an overwhelming majority in the General Assembly. We strongly advocate an increase in the category of non-permanent membership, only so as to reflect proportionately the increase in the general membership of the United Nations, particularly in the large number of small and medium-sized States.

The deliberations over the past 10 years show clearly that there are unbridgeable differences on the composition and veto issues. Therefore, it is time to consider seriously the alternative proposal of the Non-Aligned Movement that, if there is no agreement on other categories of membership, expansion should take place, for the time being, in the non-permanent category. Many countries outside the Movement also share that view; the Italian proposal submitted last year echoes that position. The Movement's proposal to increase the number of seats in the non-permanent category not only is logical but also proportionately reflects the increase in the general membership of the Organization.

It is also apparent that the majority of Member States desire the elimination of the veto. As the Commission on Global Governance phrased it in its 1995 report, to add more permanent members and give them the veto would be regression, not reform. Apart from Member States, scholars and blue-ribbon commissions have criticized the veto provisions as being inequitable, undemocratic and debilitating to the Council's capacity to fulfil its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

We also know the history of the veto. It was a device born under coercion when some of the existing permanent members came forward with the quite simple threat of "no veto, no Organization". Despite that threat, the question of the veto still had to be put to the vote, as it did not command a consensus. The vote of 13 June 1945 of 30 in favour, 2 against, 15 abstaining and 3 absent is reflected in the record of the Organization.

The justification for the veto offered at the time was that those who saw themselves as victors of the Second World War should not — at that time or ever in the future — launch actions against any one of their number. The logical conclusion then was that the concept of the veto related to the actionable position of the Charter under Chapter VII only and that a subsequent extension of that extraordinary and exceptional right into areas beyond Chapter VII was an unwarranted license going well beyond the original concept.

The apprehensions of the Member States were soon confirmed when those with the veto power made use of it, not for collective peace and security, but for their own national interests. During the cold war, such use of the veto led to the virtual paralysis of the Security Council. Consequently, some issues — issues that are as old as the United Nations itself — are still awaiting resolution, such as those affecting the people of Palestine and Kashmir.

There have been some positive trends in the area of the working methods of the Security Council under cluster 2 issues. Notable improvements include Arria-formula meetings to enrich the Council's discussions on pressing issues; the Secretary-General's retreats to discuss various thematic issues; the triangular coordination meetings between troop-contributing countries, the Security Council and the Secretariat; open debates on issues affecting Member States; ministerial or summit-level meetings; and briefings by the Security Council President for non-members.

There are still many issues, however, which need transparency, openness and consistency. To this end, the General Assembly can encourage the Security Council to take the following measures. First, the Security Council must evolve a mechanism relating to how the provisions of Chapter VI of the Charter can be fully utilized for the pacific settlement of disputes and for determining the roles which the Security Council,

the Secretary-General and other United Nations bodies could play in resolving disputes and conflicts through peaceful means.

Secondly, the Security Council should prepare a compendium of resolutions, conflicts and disputes with regard to which the Council has been unable to secure implementation, with a view to taking remedial action.

Lastly, both the letter and spirit of rule 48 of the Security Council's provisional rules of procedure calling for Council meetings to be held in public should be adhered to. Closed meetings and informal consultations should be kept to a minimum and should be the exception, as they were meant to be.

Mr. Faaborg-Andersen (Denmark): The issue before us today is of major importance for the future of the United Nations. As the Secretary-General said, we may be at a moment in history no less decisive than 1945 itself, when our Organization was founded.

Denmark agrees with the Secretary-General and all those who in recent weeks have advocated the parallel strengthening of the United Nations and the Security Council. We look forward to receiving the report of the high-level panel with regard to the Security Council. We hope that new inspiration and new ideas will be forthcoming in that report.

We want the United Nations to remain at the core of efforts to tackle old and new security challenges, such as terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. A comprehensive reform effort is needed in order to make the Council more representative.

Additional central questions relate to how we can improve the efficiency of the decision-making processes and ensure compliance with Council resolutions. We would also welcome a strengthening of the division of labour and cooperation with regional and subregional organizations. Over the past 50 years we have been building strong regional institutions with a view to overcoming our divisions and managing our problems.

I would like to make a few comments on the work of the Open-ended Working Group. Denmark regrets that, after 10 years, the Working Group has still has not been able to finalize its work. New impetus is needed if results are to be achieved. A step-by-step approach could be taken, addressing cluster 1 and cluster 2 issues separately. But the issue of the expansion of the permanent and non-permanent membership of the Council and the question of the veto should be addressed as a package. Cluster 1 issues will probably not be resolved in the Working Group and will eventually have to be tackled at the political level.

In his intervention in the general debate just a few weeks ago, the Danish Minister for Foreign Affairs stressed that we, the Member States, must take the lead in reforming and strengthening the Organization. In other words, the ball is in our court.

We must enable the United Nations to take credible, efficient action to meet the challenges of this century and this Millennium. That is our collective responsibility and our collective duty. Progress in reforming the Security Council to better reflect the world of today is essential in this regard.

Mr. Mercado (Philippines): We would have liked to speak at greater length on the two related agenda items — the reform of the Security Council and the report of the Security Council — but in view of the limited time, at our disposal, we refer members to the distributed text of our statement for our views on specific issues addressed by the report of the Council.

Three weeks ago, the Secretary-General set out before us the challenges that confront the United Nations. Some of them bear repeating as we discuss issues relating to the agenda items under consideration. The Secretary-General said that we have come to a fork in the road and that the United Nations finds itself in a situation similar to that of its founding days. He also said that there is an urgent need for the Security Council to regain the confidence and respect of Member States. In this regard, the Security Council needs to address the issue of its composition with great urgency.

Against that backdrop, my delegation would thus urge Member States to seriously consider reaching broad agreement on how to carry Security Council reform forward. Ten years of deliberations should have provided us with the wherewithal for taking bold steps to make the United Nations relevant to the geopolitical realities of the twenty-first century.

The Philippines is committed to promoting agreement on measures aimed at achieving a more open and transparent decision-making process in the Security Council, as well as at finding an acceptable compromise on the expansion of the number of permanent and non-permanent members of the Council.

As we remain far apart on the mode of its expansion, perhaps we should narrow down our options to a consensus denominator. Hopefully, we can arrive at a consensus decision on this important and sensitive issue during the review of the Millennium Declaration in 2005.

The President took the Chair.

On the working methods of the Council, we believe a number of improvements have been made over the past few years with a view to increasing transparency and participation by non-members. Nevertheless, the Council's procedures and the recent positive innovations in its working methods remain provisional and ad hoc in nature. The Council might wish to heed the Secretary-General's suggestion, made last year in his agenda for further change, that the Council consider codifying its recent changes. One way would be for it to adopt its provisional rules of procedure and annex its recent innovations to the rules. We also support more dialogue between the representatives of the Council and the General Assembly's Open-ended Working Group on the Council's working methods and related issues. Those meetings have proved useful and provide a good way for the Council and the General Assembly to have an interactive exchange on a broad range of issues.

As we continue with our exercise on the reform of the Security Council, we should acknowledge that the Open-ended Working Group has had some influence in initiating reform in the working methods of the Council, including the holding of more open meetings and regular briefings and improved arrangements for consultations with troop-contributing countries. We therefore believe that the Open-ended Working Group should focus on the main outstanding issues of expansion, while preserving the tentative agreements reached on cluster 2 issues relating to the Council's working methods.

My delegation is prepared to support all efforts aimed at reaching a comprehensive package agreement consisting of measures relating to the expansion of the Council's membership and to enhancing the transparency of the Council's working methods.

On the report of the Security Council, the General Assembly, which is the only United Nations organ that receives reports from the other principal organs, including the Security Council, must effectively take the opportunity each session to comment on and assess the Security Council's work and decisions during the period covered by its annual report.

It might also be useful for the Council to consider submitting, from time to time each year, special reports, as referred to in Article 15 of the Charter, so as to keep the General Assembly abreast of the Council's work. For example, the period covered by the present report ends on 31 July 2003. Given the major developments on issues of which the Council is seized, a supplemental special report from, say, 1 August to 1 October also would have been useful.

We are pleased to note from the report that the year under review was marked by significant events, highlighted by, among others, the Council's timely actions to stabilize security conditions and improve the humanitarian situation in conflict situations, particularly in Africa, such as the deployment of an Interim Emergency Multinational Force in Bunia and an Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) vanguard force in Liberia. Separate Security Council missions to Central Africa and to West Africa, respectively, benefited from firsthand observations of the actual political and security conditions in those areas.

Immediate responses aimed at providing humanitarian relief to the people of Iraq after the military action against Iraq were provided by the Council through resolutions 1472 (2003), 1476 (2003) and 1483 (2003). My delegation wishes to acknowledge the unanimous adoption yesterday of resolution 1511 (2003) on Iraq, which is not contained in the report, as yet another determined effort on the part of the Council to preserve its unity.

We find the thematic debates of the Council very useful, and they should be continued. Nevertheless, we believe that they also aim at some action-oriented objective over a medium-term period. Thematic debates of the Council could also be synchronized with debates on the same issues in the General Assembly for the purpose of linking decisions or appropriate policy action by the Council and by the General Assembly on those issues. Interaction between the two organs, taking into account their respective mandates, on such issues, should be explored.

My delegation continues to look forward to a more substantive consideration of the report of the Council by the General Assembly, not necessarily of the whole report, but at least of certain issues

addressed in it. In this regard, it is suggested that specific issues be identified by the President for more intensive discussion, taking into account Article 12, in a more informal format, such as informal consultations or round tables. Such discussions should aim at reaching a specific outcome such as a decision, a Chairman's summary or simply an aide-mémoire of the discussion. Such an approach would, in our view, be in line with the intent of the earlier resolution on the revitalization of the General Assembly. The issues selected could be country-specific or could be one of the thematic matters considered by the Council.

If there is consensus on this approach, more time should be accorded for considering this agenda item than is presently given.

Finally, my delegation wishes to reiterate the following principles which we believe should guide Security Council actions in the pursuit of its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and stability, as enunciated a few weeks ago by my President before this Assembly, which are the following.

First, the principle of collective security established under the United Nations Charter should be observed. Secondly, the Security Council should maintain and pursue a multilateral approach towards the performance of its primary role. Thirdly, observance of the rule of law is of paramount importance in the maintenance of international peace and security.

Sir Emyr Jones Parry (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom welcomes and supports the proposal made by the Secretary-General in his speech to the General Assembly on 23 September to set up a panel of eminent personalities to look at the current challenges to peace and security, the contribution of collective action to addressing them, the functioning of the major organs of the United Nations, and how the United Nations may be strengthened by the reform of its institutions and processes.

The Security Council has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. Clearly, consideration of how the Council might be adapted to meet those challenges better should be part of the panel's mandate.

Permanent membership of the Council carries obligations both in the Council and to the wider constituency of non-Council Member States. Throughout the United Nations system, the United Kingdom works to fulfil those obligations. Moreover, we believe that the Security Council as a whole must seek to draw strength from the underpinning support of the General Assembly as a whole.

The United Kingdom believes that we should be acting to improve the transparency, accessibility and accountability of the Council to the wider membership.

On each of these matters — transparency, accessibility and accountability — the United Kingdom has contributed to the functioning of the Security Council. We have sought to build constructive, collaborative relationships between the Council and other parts of the United Nations system, including the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Secretariat. It is important that there should be close cooperation on country issues and on generic areas such as the role of women in peace and security, the importance of justice and the rule of law, and other such examples.

We should all be looking for further pragmatic and easily implementable ideas that can both improve the quality and effectiveness of the Council's work and that are useful to the wider membership of the United Nations as well.

But beyond improvements to the way the Council operates, the United Kingdom believes that an enlargement of the Council is overdue if it is to become more representative of the modern world. We therefore support enlargement in both the permanent and non-permanent membership. We have long supported permanent membership for Germany and for Japan; we regard India and Brazil as obvious candidates from Asia and Latin America; and we support permanent representation from Africa.

We want to see more progress on Security Council reform, and soon. The United Kingdom is ready to work with other Member States to achieve this reform. We believe core objectives are shared among many of us. But if we are to achieve progress, regional groups must either come to conclusions or relinquish their stranglehold on progress.

The Council is part of a wider system — a structure that encompasses bodies such as the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the agencies and the Secretariat. For the United Kingdom,

reform of the Council should be only one part of a wide-ranging programme to enhance the effectiveness of the United Nations as a whole. We are very keen, therefore, to engage in the processes now under way of revitalizing and reinvigorating the Assembly — under your particular and inspiring leadership, Mr. President - and to reform the other bodies, ensuring that the United Nations and its agencies continue to adapt and modernize.

Above all, our policies must be focused on real priorities, on the challenges we face to eradicate hunger, to establish the rule of law globally, to defeat terrorism, to end the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and, above all, to demonstrate that multilateralism, embodied most of all in the United Nations, can provide the answers to these and other problems.

It is not least for that reason that we have welcomed the Secretary-General's proposed eminent personalities panel and his call for potentially radical institutional reform.

Mr. Talbot (Guyana): At this late stage in the debate on this item, my words will be few.

First, they are words of appreciation for the efforts of the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session, Mr. Jan Kavan, to advance the process of Security Council reform. They are also words of appreciation for the Secretary-General for his initiative to set up a panel of eminent persons to look at questions of peace and security and the overall strengthening of the United Nations system.

The leaders of the world resolved at the Millennium Summit to intensify their efforts to achieve a comprehensive reform of the Security Council in all its aspects. Today, three years later, their resolve remains to be translated into definitive progress. As many have pointed out, reform of the Security Council is arguably the most difficult decision that this Organization has to face. But without minimizing the complexities involved, it is a decision we cannot escape. For what is the alternative? It is a status quo that can be preserved only at great cost to this Organization. Ultimately, it will be at the cost of what the Secretary-General has described as the great strength of the United Nations — its legitimacy.

The loss of legitimacy will be detrimental to the United Nations and will undermine its effectiveness. The risk of such a loss has grown with a Security Council that at its core remains wedded to the past. With the membership of this Organization expanding over the past half century, the Council has become increasingly less representative and increasingly more inequitable in its composition.

The positions on reform of the Council, including that of my delegation, are well known after 10 years of discussion. My delegation has called for the elimination of the veto or at least its limitation to matters under Chapter VII of the Charter. We have called for expansion in both permanent and non-permanent categories. We have expressed the view that in an expansion of the category of permanent members there should be no distinction with respect to rights and privileges between the current and new permanent members. Relying as we do on this collective system for our own peace and security, Guyana has sought assurance that the new, reformed Council can provide reasonable protection for our sovereignty and territorial integrity as a consideration of paramount importance.

What we consider to be required now is the political determination to move forward, taking due account of all the interests and concerns of Member States. Speaking before this Assembly on 25 September this year, President Bharrat Jagdeo of Guyana stated:

> "It is time that the United Nations Security Council, which has the primary responsibility under the Charter for international peace and security, be made more representative of the wider international community. The Council must be expanded, and the role of developing countries in that body appropriately strengthened. To that end, Guyana is prepared to support the candidacies of Brazil, India and an African country for permanent seats on the Council, as well as a suitable number of non-permanent seats for other developing countries." (*A/58/PV.12, p. 5*)

Tough decisions are required if the Security Council is to be made more representative, democratic, transparent and effective. Guyana is willing to take decisions that will lead us to the early achievement of that goal.

The President: I call on the observer of Palestine.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to condemn the criminal aggression committed three days ago against a group of American citizens on a journey to Gaza, which led to the deaths of three people. The Palestinian leadership and Authority, while condemning such acts categorically, will make every effort to arrest the criminals and bring them to justice. I should also like to extend my condolences to the families of the victims and the United States Administration.

We speak today as the owners of the cause that has, perhaps, been considered more often by the Security Council than any other. We can therefore say that we have a realistic and practical understanding of the Security Council's work and its effectiveness, its working methods and the need for change in its composition.

With regard to its effectiveness, if we use the success of the Council's work in the Middle East and the Palestinian question as a yardstick, we can say that the Council has had none whatsoever. It has failed entirely in discharging its duties in the maintenance of international peace and security. It has failed, first, because of the repeated use of the veto by one of its permanent members; to be precise, 27 vetoes have been exercised against draft resolutions on the Palestinian issue since 1976. The most recent of these came only three days ago on the question of the wall that could end any chance for peace between the Palestinian and Israeli sides.

The Security Council has failed, secondly, because of its inability to follow up on the implementation of its resolutions and to challenge their violation. Not one of the 37 resolutions on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories has been implemented. Each has been violated in its entirety and with the imposition of long-term, dangerous and illegal changes in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, despite the adoption of new such resolutions and international law. Effectiveness was lacking in this case, primarily because of the unrestricted use of the veto.

The request to abolish the veto power may be deemed unrealistic, but its undefined and unlimited use cannot continue. If it does continue, the Security Council will not be able to assume its duty under the Charter. The most simple beginning in this respect is an interpretation of paragraph 3 of Article 27 of the Charter, which states that a permanent member that is a party to a dispute should abstain from voting in decisions under Chapter VI of the Charter. The question here is, when is a permanent member considered to be a party to a given dispute? Would the use of the veto a specified number of times be sufficient cause for the application of Article 27? We believe so, because there is no other way to explain the great number of vetoes by the same member on the same issue.

We believe that the issue of the Security Council's working methods is no less important than that of the Council's composition. The situation is, quite frankly, catastrophic. The Council works in quasi-secrecy, most often in closed meetings, while the rest of the United Nations membership and the parties concerned are not even allowed to listen. Moreover, the Council works in an unclear, imprecise and provisional manner owing to the lack of permanent rules of procedure. Naturally, that benefits the large Powers at the expense of the general membership of the United Nations.

With respect to the Council's composition, we agree, of course, with all that has been said about the need to expand both the permanent and non-permanent categories of the Council's membership in order to reflect more faithfully the composition of the United Nations. Our humble opinion in that respect is that the issue of agreement on the expansion of the permanent membership is important and should not be left unresolved. Until it is resolved, agreement on other important and urgent issues will not be reached, including the Council's working methods and limits and restrictions on the veto power.

We commend the position taken by the Secretary-General in his calls for radical change and reform of the Organization and on the need to give priority to the Security Council's reform. We agree with the Secretary-General.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item. One representative has requested to exercise the right of reply. May I remind Members that statements in the exercise of the right of reply are limited to ten minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second intervention and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Shacham (Israel): The Palestinian Observer just spent a lot of time in his statement blaming others for his failure to advance his goals in the Security Council. He blamed the Security Council's working methods. He blamed a permanent member of the Council that has done more to support the cause of peace than any other State. Indeed, the Palestinian Observer is indignant that the Security Council would not swallow whole the Palestinian portrayal of the conflict as black and white, as victim and villain, rather than as a conflict involving two peoples, each with rights and responsibilities.

Israel is ready and willing to meet its responsibilities and has proven this with concrete action. Yet, we are still looking for a Palestinian partner ready to do the same and, in particular, to fulfil its fundamental responsibility to end terrorism. Every delegate who cares to know, knows the truth fully and understands that the reason the Security Council did not adopt the latest Palestinian draft resolution three days ago was simply because the Palestinian side refused to negotiate a fair and balanced text that would refer not only to Israeli responsibilities but to Palestinian responsibilities as well.

The Palestinian Observer Mission apparently expected the Council to blindly embrace its partisan draft. Yet, when five members, including two permanent members, would not, or could not, submit to this Palestinian diktat, indignant Palestinian outrage was the result. That Security Council members should have the audacity to suggest that the text should include a clear condemnation of terrorism and a call for the fulfilment of Palestinian obligations was just too much of an affront for the Palestinian Observer Mission to bear. The Palestinian Observer remains indignant. Alas, he is incensed. Indeed, what is the relevance of the fact that he considers it unacceptable that a resolution should condemn the murder of innocent civilians by Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade and call for their dismantlement? That such counter-terrorist action is early required by the United Nations-backed road map and insisted upon by Security Council members is of no consequence to him.

Thus, it is this refusal of the Security Council to swallow whole the warped presentation of the Palestinian Observer Mission that constitutes sufficient cause to call yet again for the convening of the emergency special session of the General Assembly so that we can, yet again, have an opportunity to spend more time listening and considering how everyone but the Palestinian side is responsible for the present predicament and to produce, yet again, another resolution enshrining Palestinian entitlement, while ignoring Palestinian obligations and, yet again, to cast Israel alone as the villain and the Palestinians alone as the victims.

Perhaps the Palestinian Observer should stop for once looking for someone else to blame and stop for once this charade in which lofty rhetoric produces base, distorted resolutions that serve only to mask the fact that the Palestinian leadership refuses to do the one thing that is required of it: to fight terrorism.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): We have just heard an intervention from someone who I am not sure is normal — I am not sure whether he was talking about the issue under consideration by the General Assembly, the issue I spoke on a few moments ago. Maybe this representative has a prepared statement, written previously, that he can deliver anywhere at any time, irrespective of the issue under consideration.

We have submitted some facts and I have not heard any contradiction of these facts. The Security Council has adopted 37 resolutions concerning the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, that are among 73 resolutions on the different aspects of the question of Palestine. This is in addition to Security Council resolutions regarding other aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict. None of these resolutions have been heeded by Israel, the occupying Power. An additional fact is that since 1976, a permanent member of the Security Council used the right of veto 27 times on draft resolutions submitted by Palestine. This number does not include other vetoes concerning other aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict. A third fact is that no other permanent member exercised its right of veto on any of these resolutions. These facts have nothing to do with the political hallucination uttered by the representative of Israel a few moments ago.

The President: The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 56.

Agenda item 11 (*continued*)

Report of the Security Council (A/58/2)

The President: The Assembly will recall that in opening the debate on item 11, Report of the Security Council, I advised that I would implement the provision contained in paragraph 12 of General Assembly resolution 51/241, whereby "The President of the General Assembly shall assess the debate on this item and consider the need for further consideration of the report of the Security Council". To facilitate this process, this item was presented for separate consideration in the programme of work of the plenary.

Over the course of three meetings, 40 speakers addressed the report of the Security Council. The United States, in its capacity as President of the Security Council for the month of October, provided a succinct presentation of the Council's report. The United States was, however, the only one of the five permanent members of the Council, joined later by another permanent member, to speak in the debate on item 11. Of the ten non-permanent members of the Council, only four presented views on the report in the debate. Members felt it was a pity that so few Security Council members, particularly permanent members, spoke in the debate.

It was suggested that, in order to get more and better information, all fifteen members of the Council should be requested, in adopting the report, to give their views on it. There were divergent views regarding the separation of item 11 from item 56 on reform of the Council, for consideration by the plenary. Among those who specifically addressed this issue, some thought that separate debates on these two priority issues was warranted. However, disappointment was also expressed concerning the return to separate debates.

While a number of speakers focused their remarks specifically on the report of the Council, in the final analysis few spoke strictly or fully on the report. Some combined their remarks on both items 11 and 56, while others, speaking to the report of the Council, made only cursory remarks on that issue and went on to comment more substantially on reform issues. I now wish to turn to the principal points emerging from the debate on item 11.

There were widely divergent views on the quality and usefulness of the Council's report. On the one hand, the report received commendation and support as a comprehensive, yet concise document, evidence of the Council's hard work and productivity, and an invaluable source of reference information and insight into the activities of the Council. The report was also cited as an encouraging sign of the Council's continuing positive response to the demand of Member States that its report should be more analytical, concise and easy to read.

On the other hand, it was also stated that the report reflected neither the depth nor importance of the Council's work; was too descriptive and lengthy and was devoid of elements that would allow an assessment of the work of the Council; lacked clarity; and was characterized by an abundance of information, but little in the way of explanation or analysis. This led some to conclude that the report did not lend itself to the in-depth reflection that it should command.

It was the widely held view that the report of the Council needed to be a document more useful to Member States, one that had greater analytical content and that provided the full accountability to which the Assembly had a legitimate right. It was said that the report should not be confined to what the Council had achieved, but should also address what had worked, and why. In this way, the Assembly would be in a position to evaluate in depth the workings of the Council.

The Security Council's procedure for the preparation of its report was also raised as an issue in the debate. It was considered regrettable, in that regard, that the Council had not observed its practice of previous years of discussing among Security Council members, in open meeting, how each member's views should be reflected in the report during the drafting process. That practice, it was contended, was in the interest of transparency and accountability. The view was also expressed that the Council ought to revert to holding open meetings on its report.

The wider issue of the relationship between the General Assembly and the Security Council was also taken up in the context of the Council's report. A satisfactory relationship between the principal organs was considered to be fundamental to the work of the United Nations. It was contended that the report reconfirmed the rules that regulate the rapport between the General Assembly and the Security Council and provided an important opportunity for the Assembly to examine in depth the activities of the Council and to

identify action that should be taken to achieve the improvements required. The Council's report was also seen as providing a rare opportunity for dialogue between the Assembly and the Council, a dialogue that should not be ritualistic.

Attention was also drawn to Article 15 of the Charter, which both calls for the report of the Council and characterizes its content. In this context, it was emphasized that the Article was meant to provide for more than a merely symbolic or ritualistic act. In that context, it was said that the relationship between the General Assembly and the Security Council left much to be desired and that it might be contended that the concentration of decision-making power within the Security Council has been at the expense of the General Assembly. This need not be so, it was contended, because the Charter sets out how the various organs of the United Nations should reciprocally support one another.

Also on the relationship between the General Assembly and the Security Council, the view was expressed that the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council should consult frequently, particularly during crises. It was also pointed out that the General Assembly still does not receive the special reports envisaged in Article 24, paragraph 3, of the Charter, which calls for "the Security Council ... when necessary [to submit] special reports to the General Assembly for its consideration". If such specific reports were received, it was contended, they would contribute to promoting an active relationship between the General Assembly and the Security Council. They would also provide a basis whereby the General Assembly could formulate recommendations for the Council.

The question was raised of whether the relationship between the General Assembly and the Security Council was clear, especially with reference to whether the Security Council reported to the Assembly and was subordinate to the Assembly.

Nonetheless, there was positive reaction to, and commendation for, a number of procedures of the Council that were considered to be useful and developments in the relationship between the General Assembly and the Council that were considered to be both positive and promising.

Open meetings of the Council received notable support, as did the monthly briefings by the President of the Security Council and the periodic wrap-up meetings to which non-member States were invited. It was suggested that these end-of-month wrap-up meetings could be institutionalized in order to enhance interaction and promote synergy between the work of the Assembly and the work of the Council. It was pointed out, however, that the Council's changing of open meetings to open debates, though welcomed, was often done without adequate notice, leaving non-members unable to take full advantage of the opportunities.

Speakers also commented on the initiatives taken by the Council in respect of States not members of the Council. Providing briefings for non-member States and public discussion of pressing issues that relate to the maintenance of peace and security were cited in that context. In that regard, public discussions were considered to assist the Council in producing more balanced and impartial decisions.

Concern was nevertheless expressed regarding the Council's lack of transparency and its failure to give due attention to the views of the wider membership. The importance of giving all non-members of the Council the opportunity to express their views on issues before the Council and of more systematic consultations with non-member States was emphasized in that context.

It was suggested, however, that where decisions are taken before a debate is held and where non-members are heard after Council members have spoken, the contribution of non-members cannot be really effective. The tendency for decision-making to be concentrated among the permanent members was considered to be an undemocratic process, undermining the legitimacy of Council decisions and the authority of Council action. It was emphasized in that regard that the views of non-members should be taken into account before the Council makes decisions.

Views diverged on the issue of thematic debates in the Security Council. Some supported and commended the debates, which they found to be helpful. It was also argued, however, that thematic debates were an unnecessary addition to the work of the Council, giving rise to increasing concern about duplication and encroachment on subjects that are more appropriately handled by the General Assembly. It was also stated that wrap-up meetings that focused on a

thematic discussion totally unrelated to the Council's activities for that month did not serve their purpose.

Regarding the relationships between the Council and other United Nations bodies and regional organizations, it was asserted that such relationships were of particular importance. Consultations between the Council and regional and subregional institutions were particularly welcomed.

In respect of reporting procedures, it was contended that if the General Assembly wanted clear reporting, it should provide clear criteria. It was suggested that the Assembly's failure to provide such criteria might have accounted for the regression in the quality of the current Security Council report.

Regarding the outcome of the Assembly's consideration of the report of the Security Council, it was proposed that a special meeting of the Council should be held to hear the response of the General Assembly to the report. According to the proposal, this might be done through a statement to be made by the President of the Assembly or, alternatively, through the adoption of a formal document to be presented to the Council.

Having now given the Assembly my assessment of the debate on the report of the Security Council, I wish to revert to resolution 51/241. Its annex states that the President is to hold informal consultations as appropriate following assessment of the debate, to determine if there are recommendations that might be made to the Security Council. I will be consulting informally, including with those delegations that have made specific proposals, to make a determination of any further action that might be taken in respect of the Security Council's report.

May I take it that the General Assembly takes note of the report of the Security Council contained in document A/58/2?

It was so decided.

The President: We have thus concluded this stage of our consideration of agenda item 11.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.

United Nations A/58/PV.37

General Assembly
Fifty-eighth session

Official Records

37th plenary meeting
Monday, 20 October 2003, 10 a.m.
New York

President: The Hon. Julian R. Hunte ..... (Saint Lucia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 8 ***(continued)***

Adoption of the agenda and organization of work

Letter from the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences (A/58/356/Add.1)

The President: The Assembly will now turn its attention to document A/58/356/Add.1, which contains a letter dated 13 October 2003 from the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences addressed to the President of the Assembly. Members are aware that, pursuant to section I, paragraph 7, of Assembly resolution 40/243, no subsidiary organ of the General Assembly may meet at United Nations Headquarters during the main part of a regular session of the Assembly unless explicitly authorized by the Assembly.

Authorization is thus sought for the subsidiary organ cited in the letter, on the strict understanding that meetings would have to be accommodated within available facilities and services.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to authorize the subsidiary organ of the Assembly listed in the letter of the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences to meet during the main part of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 12

Report of the Economic and Social Council (A/58/3 (Part I))

The President: I give the floor to the President of the Economic and Social Council, His Excellency Mr. Gert Rosenthal, to introduce the report of the Economic and Social Council.

Mr. Rosenthal (*spoke in Spanish*): It gives me great pleasure to introduce the report of the Economic and Social Council for 2003, circulated in a preliminary version under symbol A/58/3.

The United Nations Charter establishes a clear relationship between the General Assembly and the Council, and, as main organs of the Organization, we work together in multiple ways. But in the past year, two new avenues of cooperation have opened up, which will surely lead to a much stronger relationship in the future. I refer, first, to the joint role that the Monterrey Consensus assigns to the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council in follow-up activities to the International Conference on Financing for Development. Secondly, I refer to General Assembly resolution 57/270 B, adopted in June of this year, which confirmed the central role of the Economic and Social Council in promoting an integrated and coordinated implementation and follow-up of decisions adopted at major United Nations summits and conferences in the economic and social spheres.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

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Document A/58/3 presents a broad vision of Economic and Social Council activities during this calendar year. I would like to highlight those aspects that I find to be of special significance.

First, I would like to mention the Economic and Social Council high-level joint meeting with the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization (WTO), held on 14 April. This was the first fully reconstituted meeting after Monterrey. As such, it featured significant innovations both in its preparations and its format, to enable it to fulfil its new specific role in the follow-up to the conference. Preparations involved extensive consultations within the Council and with the management of the Bretton Woods institutions, the WTO, and the executive directors of the World Bank. Informal hearings with members of civil society and the business sector were also held in March 2003.

I am very pleased with the outcome of the meeting, both in form and in substance. As to form, we were able to attract a very high level of intergovernmental representation of the main multilateral stakeholders, including the Chairman of the Development Committee. A representative of the WTO intergovernmental machinery participated in the meeting for the first time since the spring meetings were initiated in 1998. The President of the General Assembly also participated, as did a significant number of executive directors of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Also attending were members of the community of non-governmental organizations and the business sector.

On the substance, we had a very productive interactive dialogue on the progress achieved and the obstacles encountered in the application of the commitments contained in the Monterrey Consensus. In summary, this yearly gathering strengthened the intergovernmental cooperation of the Council with its key counterparts in Washington and Geneva. The discussions also focused increasingly on major themes in the Monterrey Consensus, which proved very productive.

When the high-level dialogue of the Assembly on financing for development meets on 29 October, it will be able to build on the discussions of the Economic and Social Council joint meeting with the Bretton Woods institutions and the WTO. The outcome of the spring meeting is reflected in the summary of the President, which was welcomed by the Council at its substantive session.

Let me now turn to the outcome of the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council. As I have already stated, I feel that 2003 has been a successful year for the Council, and one rich in innovations.

First, the Economic and Social Council responded well to its crucial role in examining development policies during its high-level segment. The segment focused mainly on promoting an integrated approach to rural development in developing countries for poverty eradication and sustainable development. The Council gave important policy directions on how rural development could best help achieve the medium-term goals and other internationally agreed development goals. It also called for a new integrated approach to rural development, one that built on major United Nations conferences and summits since Rio, bringing together the social, economic and environmental dimensions of development. The ministerial declaration adopted by the Council highlighted the fundamental impact of international cooperation and market access on rural development.

The focus of the Council's ministerial declaration on a multi-sectoral approach and on partnerships was mirrored in the attendance at that segment. Heads of United Nations agencies, ministers and policymakers from various sectors joined with non-governmental organizations and business sector representatives in the debate, round tables and related events. A United Nations public-private alliance was launched in response to the ministerial declaration. This alliance encourages business approaches that promote economic and social advancement and profitable investment in rural areas, starting with Madagascar as the first pilot country. It can be said generally that the Economic and Social Council put rural development back on the international agenda after a period of relative neglect by Governments and their development partners.

The Council also exercised with renewed dynamism its role in development cooperation. The operational activities segment is becoming a meeting place for the world of development cooperation. A select and influential mix of policymakers, bilateral cooperation agencies representatives of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee,

the United Nations, its funds and programmes and its country teams and civil society gathered in Geneva. There were panels that were able to carry out exceptionally frank discussions on difficult issues, such as the lessons learned from the United Nations system's evaluations of its activities and, crucially, the funding situation of United Nations development organizations. Many innovative ideas emerged. Reflection on budgeting of financial resources might also contribute to the follow-up to the Monterrey Conference. This dialogue will continue as we prepare for the triennial comprehensive policy review on operational activities for development that the General Assembly will conduct next year. The resolution adopted by the segment also contains detailed guidance for preparing that review.

This year's humanitarian affairs segment was also one of the best, since the segment was created as part of the first phase of the Secretary-General's reform. Panels also brought new ideas to the table on issues such as the transition from relief to development, humanitarian financing and HIV/AIDS-related emergencies. For example, considerable attention was paid to the high risks involved in transition and to the need for flexible transitional funding mechanisms that would enable the simultaneous financing of relief and development. Member States reached agreement on an action-oriented resolution, which is now being followed up by the humanitarian agencies. The resolution contains a new and ambitious agenda on humanitarian financing for the humanitarian community, as well as for the donors and recipients.

At its coordination segment, the Council built on the recently adopted General Assembly resolution on the coordinated implementation of conferences. The Council decided to undertake informal consultations, starting next year, to develop a multi-year programme for its coordination segment. As Members know, the Assembly has decided that the Economic and Social Council should review the progress made in implementing conferences annually by focusing on a common cross-sectoral thematic issue at its coordination segment. At its next session, the Economic and Social Council will continue to reflect on how best to implement the decisions of the Assembly on this issue.

The Council has added a new dimension to its work over the past year through the creation of ad hoc advisory groups on African countries emerging from conflict, for which the guidelines of the General Assembly were followed. Members will recall that resolution 55/217, on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa, had requested the Economic and Social Council to consider creating such groups with a view to assessing the needs of the country's concerned and elaborating a long-term programme of support. The Council created two of these groups — one on Guinea-Bissau in 2002 and the other on Burundi in 2003, at the request of the respective countries' authorities.

That initiative, although recent, has proven to be a useful tool to gather major development partners, including the United Nations system, the Bretton Woods institutions and donors to study jointly the needs of these countries. The groups promote a broad approach to problems related to the transition and the recovery process and to avoid a relapse into conflict. I trust that by so doing, the groups will contribute to this comprehensive approach to conflict prevention and post-conflict peace-building, as requested by the Assembly.

During the general segment, the Economic and Social Council held a meeting with the Chairpersons of all its functional commissions. Constructive proposals emerged from this session, particularly with a view to improving coordination among the commissions.

I have made some suggestions to the members of the Economic and Social Council on how we can improve our oversight and management of the Council's subsidiary bodies. We will discuss these suggestions more fully when the substantive session reconvenes. Of course, we look at this process within the context of the broader reform launched by the Secretary-General.

Several other important decisions were made. For example, the Council provided guidance on the preparation of the General Assembly high-level meeting on HIV/AIDS, held on 22 September. The Council paved the way for the General Assembly to admit a new specialized agency into the United Nations family by approving a draft relationship agreement with the World Tourism Organization. This new specialized agency can make an important contribution, particularly as we search for innovative ways to mobilize resources for the development of poor countries. The Council also reviewed the work of its

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Task Force. The Task Force, created in response to Economic and Social Council work on ICT in 2000, is well positioned to continue to promote ICT policies for development and to contribute to the preparations for the two phases of the World Summit on the Information Society.

The Economic and Social Council further reviewed the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries. It sent a strong message that progress must be accelerated. It will devote its high-level segment next year to resource mobilization and the creation of an enabling environment for poverty reduction in the framework of the implementation of the Programme of Action. The discussion will continue during the coordination segment, which will have as one of its themes the work of the United Nations system on rural development, with due consideration being given to the least developed countries. I hope that all the Members United Nations and all parts of the United Nations system will take an active part in preparing for the high-level segment. More than an event, it should be the culmination of an intense preparatory process, and lead to concrete advances for the least developed countries. The theme of the segment — the least developed countries — will also help the Council to establish a closer link with the African Union summit meeting.

The coordination segment in 2004 will also review the implementation of the Economic and Social Council's agreed conclusions of 1997 on mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system. I hope that United Nations system agencies will consider that to be a target date for the achievement of concrete results in mainstreaming gender in their work.

In conclusion, the Economic and Social Council has carried out extensive and productive work in the discharge of its coordination and oversight functions and policies. I can affirm with confidence that the Council is gaining both in effectiveness and in vitality in its role as the central strategic body in the United Nations system for promoting policy coherence and strengthening system-wide cooperation to achieve our common goals. We have come a long way, although we still have some distance to go to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. The progress we have made thus far, however, encourages me to end my statement on an optimistic note: we are moving in the right direction.

Mr. Bennouna (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): Ambassador Rosenthal, President of the Economic and Social Council, has just given us a comprehensive briefing on the work done by that body, particularly on the substantive session in Geneva. As Chairman of the Group of 77 and China, my country participated actively during that meeting and contributed to its successful outcome. We fully agree with Mr. Rosenthal's comments and conclusions, and I congratulate him and the Vice-Presidents on their work.

Ambassador Rosenthal has sought to revitalize the Economic and Social Council — an important Charter organ — and I believe that he should be able to feel a sense of satisfaction in his work in promoting the essential functions of that organ.

I should like to recall — and this point has been made before — that in the economic and social field it is the Council that is mandated by the Charter to provide coherence to the work done by the United Nations system — the family of the United Nations: all of the agencies and bodies working in specialized fields, which, unfortunately, sometimes lack the holistic vision that is necessary, particularly in today's globalized world. I believe that today it is the Economic and Social Council that must carry out that work, which is much more complex now than when the Charter was adopted.

I would like to take this opportunity to say that the work that General Assembly President Hunte is currently carrying out to revitalize the activities of the General Assembly, so as to modernize it and help it to confront the challenges of the twenty-first century, must be accompanied by the reform of the Economic and Social Council, so that that body can provide guidelines to all of the specialized agencies. Work is under way, but it has not yet been completed and must continue.

The Group of 77 participated actively in what is called the operational activities segment of Economic and Social Council. Operational activities are all of the activities of the system that make it possible for us to act in the developing countries — the poor countries — to promote development and reduce poverty. Within the Economic and Social Council we have noted that all of the developed countries are willing to give more

weight to those operational activities. But in order for us to give them more importance, secure predictable financial resources must be made available to enable the United Nations system to discharge its work in the field. Clearly — this is no secret — these resources are currently insufficient. It could even be said that it is hard to imagine that an organization such as the United Nations Development Programme should have only some $700 million annually to help all of the poor countries in the world.

Of course there is expertise and certain donor activities that need to be legitimized, but these resources are not enough. We therefore await with great interest the report that will be provided by the Secretary-General to be submitted at the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly on the question of financing operational activities, as well as the triennial policy review that is set for that time. We hope that by next year a substantive debate will take place on financing for development.

We also take note with satisfaction of the work done by the Economic and Social Council at its second segment, the humanitarian segment. The resolution adopted by the Economic and Social Council this year strengthens coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance provided by the various stakeholders within the United Nations system. The report of the Secretary-General to the Economic and Social Council and to the General Assembly will reflect progress made in the follow-up to Council resolution 2003/5, and we hope that in this manner we will be able to make progress in strengthening the coordination of the entire United Nations system in the humanitarian field.

Speaking of the humanitarian field, I would like to say how shaken we were by the tragedy that occurred in Iraq on 19 August 2003, which cost the lives of Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello and a number of worthy staff members of the United Nations and which requires us to be even more vigilant in coordinating our work in the humanitarian field and in the safety and security that must be given to all United Nations staff members.

I will mention another matter we are particularly concerned with and where I think we have made a major contribution. That is the question of the integrated follow-up and implementation of commitments undertaken at major United Nations conferences since the Millennium Declaration was adopted in 2000, including the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and the International Conference on Financing for Development, as well as the World Trade Organization (WTO) conference in Doha on international trade.

As you know, the adoption by the General Assembly in June 2003, of resolution 57/270 B was a major achievement which will be discussed in the Second Committee as well as in plenary meetings. We do hope that in 2005, which is in two years time, we will have a summit meeting on development that will assess the progress made in poverty reduction and education in poor countries. Furthermore, we hope there will be interesting mechanisms to follow up the financing for development, as they were envisaged at Monterrey.

It is impossible to resolve the issue of financing for development unless there is a dialogue between our Organization, the United Nations in New York and the Bretton Woods institutions located in Washington, D.C., including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In spring 2003, Economic and Social Council President Rosenthal moved this dialogue forward. We had a very interesting session here in New York, but we want to move beyond mere intellectual discussion so that together we may draft operational programmes. We believe, and I speak on behalf of the G-77, that the World Bank and the IMF need the United Nations and the United Nations needs the IMF and the World Bank for the same reasons. This dialogue therefore needs to take place as soon as possible.

For this reason, the Economic and Social Council needs to move forward with its mission in this area, the goal being the implementation of the commitments undertaken in Monterrey. On 29 October 2003 there will be a high level dialogue on financing for development with the participation of the finance ministers. Here again, we hope this will provide an opportunity to move this major question forward.

I now come to one question mentioned by the President of the Council — the question of the least developed countries, the poorest of the poor. The President has just reminded us that the Council decided to devote next year, through a high level debate, to the question of helping to fund the least developed countries and helping to implement the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries, which was

adopted in 2001 by the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, held in Brussels.

The G-77 and China would like to take this opportunity once again to appeal to all donor countries and all multilateral organizations to redouble their efforts in order to implement the commitments they undertook to assist the least developed countries towards growth and development.

We hope we will be able to participate actively at the Economic and Social Council meeting on the least developed countries next year and that we will be able to advance implementation of the Brussels programme of action. The meeting that took place in Geneva this year showed, unfortunately, that the Brussels Programme of Action has not made much progress. I think we must draw that conclusion and, therefore, if the Brussels Programme made no progress, it was because there was a lack of adequate political will to help it move forward.

As Chairman of the G-77, Morocco has made the cause of the least developed countries one of its top priorities; that is why we held a ministerial meeting on the least developed countries in Rabat this year.

One of the last points, which was central to the Economic and Social Council debates in Geneva, was the subject of rural development in the developing countries and the question of agriculture and the countryside. I participated in the round tables and plenary meetings concerning rural development and it was a very high quality debate. Not only did the representatives of Governments take part, but also prominent people from civil society and stakeholders from the countries concerned. Obstacles to rural development were identified and some possible solutions were proposed. I wish to recall that the obstacles to rural development continue to include access to the markets of the developed countries, including agricultural product markets from the poor countries to the developed countries.

The irregular subsidies that the wealthy countries continue to provide to their agricultural producers ultimately threatens to ruin the agricultural sector in the poor countries. The cotton scandal is well known and was in fact brought up at the Cancún meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in September. That meeting left us greatly frustrated because the position of the developing countries was unfortunately not heard. But we hope that the dialogue will be resumed. A ministerial WTO declaration was adopted at Geneva, and we truly hope that it will enable us to redouble efforts to promote the agricultural products of the developing world. As is well known, development and growth begin with agriculture.

Finally, allow me to recall a number of problems that return every year: the lack of direct foreign investment, the instability of commodity markets and the terrible debt burden. They prevent rural development in the developing countries.

In conclusion, the Group of 77 and China expresses once again its gratitude to the President of the Economic and Social Council and his team and to all who have contributed to the success of the Economic and Social Council's substantive session in Geneva. We hope that the Council will also benefit from the encouraging positive wind of reform blowing at the United Nations, which was reflected in the interventions of all the heads of State or Government during the present session of the General Assembly.

Mr. Spatafora (Italy): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The acceding countries Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia have aligned themselves with this statement.

The European Union holds that the revitalization and reinforcement of the Economic and Social Council's role to be of the utmost importance. This objective, reaffirmed by the heads of State and Government in the Millennium Declaration three years ago, and at the recent ministerial segment of the general debate, needs to be vigorously pursued. We welcome the progress made in strengthening the Council's role. At the same time, we believe that much remains to be done to give the Economic and Social Council its rightful role in the United Nation system, as it has evolved since its inception. Here, I would like to say that we fully share and support what Ambassador Bennouna has just said about the need for the revitalization exercise — the rethinking and strengthening exercise — to apply not only to the General Assembly but also to the Economic and Social Council. I fully support and share that belief as a representative of the European Union and of Italy.

The European Union would like to highlight some of the major areas in which the role of the Economic and Social Council can be strengthened.

First, with respect to reinforcing the system-wide coordination role, the European Union is encouraged by the outcome of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the General Assembly on the follow-up to the outcomes of the major conferences, as reflected in resolution 57/270 B.

There is broad consensus on the pivotal role of the Economic and Social Council in system-wide coordination and in promoting the integrated, coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the major United Nations conferences and summits and in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. This will allow the Council to assume the responsibilities invested in it by the Millennium Summit, the Monterrey Consensus, the Johannesburg Summit and all the conferences and special sessions of the General Assembly throughout the 1990s. We welcome the decision by the Economic and Social Council in Geneva last July to finalize the list of cross-cutting themes and the multi-year work programme before its next substantive session in 2004.

At the same time, we consider the activities of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council to be of the utmost importance. They can inject great vitality into United Nations debates and activities, as demonstrated by the outcome of the recent eleventh session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. The Commission's new path shows how innovation can lead to better targeted and more productive actions. Such actions keep the United Nations at the focus of the initiatives and attention of Governments, civil society and other stakeholders. To that end, openness to innovation in identifying the most effective and result-oriented work methods is a must. Emphasis must be placed on result-oriented rather than debate-oriented work. That is the way forward. The General Assembly has asked the various commissions to continue to review their methods. We have high hopes for the results that this process will deliver.

In his report on the coordination segment of the Economic and Social Council (E/2003/67), the Secretary-General indicated areas that deserve more attention. In particular, we agree with the Secretary-General's suggestion to focus on the relationship between the Economic and Social Council and the regional commissions and on the need to build a closer relationship with specialized agencies and inter-agency bodies to ensure consistency and coherence in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. What we need is to ensure coherence and consistency. Ambassador Bennouna emphasized that aspect, as well.

The Secretary-General has suggested that

> "the role of the Economic and Social Council — and the role of the United Nations as a whole in economic and social affairs, including its relationship to the Bretton Woods institutions — needs to be rethought and reinvigorated". (*A/58/PV.7, p. 4*)

The European Union believes that the relationship between the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions and World Trade Organization has improved substantially: the preparatory process of the Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development showed the tremendous potential for a relationship among different organizations working within their mandates to achieve a common outcome. We must work hard to keep up that spirit, using that type of methodology to implement our common agenda for development. However, I have to say that we have not yet achieved the level of synergy and cooperation that should be expected. We need to ensure greater coherence and consistency in that area, as well.

The enhancement of the role of the Economic and Social Council largely depends on its ability to address issues of major relevance to Governments and public opinion. The membership has a great responsibility in establishing the themes on which we have to focus our action since they are the outcome of a negotiated process. At the same time, we must not refrain from allowing the Economic and Social Council to be more pro-active on important issues, convening ad hoc meetings whenever justified by the issue's relevance. As an example, the Economic and Social Council could, if needed, devote more of its work to country-specific situations or crises.

The humanitarian segment of the Economic and Social Council last July highlighted another area in which more action is needed. The Council plays a major role in strengthening the coordination of United Nations emergency humanitarian assistance. In that respect, Assembly resolution 57/270 B gives clear guidance to all stakeholders.

The European Union believes that humanitarian assistance should be provided in ways that support recovery and long-term development and promote self-reliance among affected populations and sustainability

of humanitarian efforts. In complex emergencies a sound transitional phase and well-coordinated and appropriately sequenced relief and development interventions can help prevent the recurrence of conflicts, which should also be an objective. In welcoming the United Nations work in this area, we believe that the Economic and Social Council must continue to focus on the challenges of the transition from relief to development.

As for post-conflict situations, the European Union is pleased by the establishment of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on African Countries emerging from conflict. The first experience with Guinea-Bissau and the recent establishment of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Burundi show that opportunities exist to improve the role of the Economic and Social Council in filling the gap between relief efforts and long-term reconstruction and development. We believe that this experience will provide useful lessons for enhancing coordination between the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council in addressing the post-conflict challenges faced by African countries.

Finally, regarding management issues, the initiative of the President of the Economic and Social Council, Ambassador Rosenthal, of presenting a memorandum on his recent experience in Geneva deserves our strongest attention. He has made a number of suggestions on how to improve the working methods of the Economic and Social Council in a way that would enable it to better discharge its statutory duties.

The European Union strongly appreciates Ambassador Rosenthal's initiative and what he stressed in his statement a few minutes ago. We cannot simply continue to repeat that the Economic and Social Council has a pivotal role in the United Nations system, while ignoring that it cannot perform many of its tasks efficiently because of its working methods. His idea of improving the ability of the general segment to carry out management tasks deserves our careful attention: it may not be a major reform, but it may well produce major results — and what we are seeking are results. The European Union encourages the President of the Economic and Social Council, Ambassador Rosenthal, to continue the process he has undertaken.

Mr. Zaki (Pakistan): We welcome the report of Economic and Social Council (A/58/3) for 2003. We also commend the President of the Economic and Social Council, Mr. Rosenthal, and other members of the Bureau for so ably steering the work of the Council during this year.

The Pakistan delegation associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The Economic and Social Council, as we all know, is one of the most important organs of the United Nations and is vested with the responsibility of contributing towards the promotion of higher standards of living, full employment and conditions of economic and social progress and development. These are the sublime ideals set forth for us by the framers of the Charter.

During the past year, the Council held a series of useful meetings and discussions at its annual substantive session in Geneva, as well as at the spring meeting of the Economic and Social Council with the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization, in pursuit of these objectives.

While many useful recommendations emerged from these meetings, particularly at the high-level segment, which was devoted to developing an integrated approach to rural development, a lot more needs to be done to make the world a happier home for the poor, underdeveloped and marginalized people.

Today's debate provides us with an opportunity to review the extent to which the Economic and Social Council has been able to achieve the objectives it has set for itself.

The Council is the central forum for the system-wide coordination of United Nations activities in the economic and social fields. Lately, it has also been given an important responsibility for the integrated and coordinated follow-up to and implementation of the outcomes of major United Nations conferences. It is, therefore, imperative that we explore all avenues to bring greater vitality and effectiveness to the work of the Council. We should particularly focus on improving the Council's coordination role vis-à-vis the Bretton Woods institutions, specialized agencies and United Nations funds and programmes.

Of greatest importance is the Council's role to contribute towards creating conditions that will stimulate economic growth and development in the underdeveloped and developing world. For this purpose, a number of important steps need to be taken

to ensure, first, that political commitment exists for achieving the agreed official development assistance target of 0.7 per cent of developed countries' gross national product; secondly, that ambitious efforts are made for debt write-off and debt restructuring, not only for the heavily indebted poor countries, but also for the low-income countries with a high growth and demand potential; thirdly, that required actions are taken for capacity-building and trade growth in the developing countries; and, fourthly, that bold political actions are taken to create innovative ways of financing development on concessional terms.

Together with larger financial and investment inflows into the developing countries, a more deliberate effort is also required to restore trade and exports as the engine of growth in developing countries. But this can only happen if there is a genuine endeavour to enable the developing countries to utilize trade for growth, rather than enforcing a globalization that further marginalizes those countries and locks them into patterns of dependency and underdevelopment.

What the world needs at this crucial juncture is action that would turn the talk about free markets, trade liberalization and the outcome of Doha Development Round into reality. The collapse of the trade talks at Cancún is a wake-up call for those who believe that the developing countries will accept persisting trade inequities masked by slogans and symbolism.

The failure at Cancún was the result of what happened in Doha, where the major trading countries refused to offer the promised concessions on development-related issues. The Declaration presented at Cancún did not address the major concerns of the developing countries. To avoid recurrence of such failures, the specific areas of interest to developing countries should remain at the core of multilateral trade negotiations, such as improving market access, special and differential treatment and the phasing out of agricultural subsidies.

The creation of a just and equitable international trading and finance system is the most important route to the revival of global economic growth and development and the realization of the Millennium Development Goals, particularly the goal of achieving a 50 per cent reduction of poverty by 2015.

For its part, the Economic and Social Council must play its role in creating conditions for correcting the imbalances in the world of trade and finance and registering tangible progress towards the achievement of Millennium Development Goals. These ambitious but imperative goals can be achieved only with a genuine political commitment on the part of all countries.

In the social sector, the Council is rendering valuable contributions, from the promotion of human rights to gender mainstreaming to achieving social development. The high-level segment this year underscored the fact that sustainable development and poverty eradication cannot be achieved without focusing on rural development, as three-fourths of the world's poor live in rural areas. In this context, the empowerment of rural women assumes particular importance.

The Government is actively pursuing a policy of far-reaching reforms to reduce and eventually eradicate poverty, especially in the rural areas, where 75 per cent of our people live. We are following an integrated approach that covers the economic, social and environmental dimensions, with emphasis on gender factors.

We in Pakistan have taken several concrete steps to ensure greater participation of women in the political process, with a view to achieving the empowerment of women and gender equality. Thirty-three per cent of seats in all local bodies have been reserved for women. Consequently, more than 40,000 women councillors, mostly in rural areas, have been elected across the country. Besides political empowerment, steps have been taken in the economic and social areas, such as compulsory and free primary education for all, particularly for girl children in rural areas; provision of affordable health care, including reproductive health; and equal opportunities for employment, vocational training and microcredit.

This is a real, peaceful revolution in which the Government and civil society are partners. There is great promise for the future, for the promotion of social and economic progress and the protection of human rights, hopefully leading to the building of a more humane society based on justice and the rule of law.

Before I close, I would like also to comment on the proposals presented by the President of the Economic and Social Council in his informal paper to strengthen the work of that body. We thank him for his thought-provoking ideas and believe that they merit

serious consideration. We are particularly attracted to the idea of rationalizing the work of the general segment. We look forward to discussing these and other ideas, with a view to strengthening the Council. A revitalized Economic and Social Council can make a real contribution to implementing its agenda of economic and social reform as well as the Millennium Development Goals.

Mr. Drobnjak (Croatia): At the outset, let me commend the President of the Economic and Social Council for his presentation of the report for the work of the Council in 2003. This is the third time that the report of the Council has been considered in the General Assembly and its committees, and in this regard we particularly welcome it. This reporting procedure enhances coordination and cooperation between two main United Nations bodies. However, let me reiterate what we said during Croatia's presidency of the Council last year — a substantive report, rather than a technical one, would be more conducive to our deliberations within the framework of the overall reform of the Organization.

We welcome the more efficient relationship between the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization (WTO), which can serve as the basis for broader-based and more inclusive international decision-making. In this regard, we look forward to an even more substantive and interactive spring meeting between the Council, the Bretton Woods institutions and the WTO.

Allow me briefly to address the issue of United Nations humanitarian and disaster relief assistance, including special economic assistance. I will focus my remarks on the part of the world where Croatia is situated — Central and South-eastern Europe. The United Nations should increase its efforts to ensure a smooth transition from the provision of humanitarian and reconstruction assistance to development activities in post-conflict environments. A number of the remarks contained in the report entitled "Economic assistance to the Eastern European States affected by the developments in the Balkans" have little value in comparison terms, because the so-called successes of the central-market economy that existed prior to 1990 cannot be compared with the real values of liberalized market economies, regardless of the impact of war.

With the goal of streamlining efforts to stabilize South-east Europe, the Stability Pact for South-eastern Europe was established as an overarching framework for simultaneous development in the fields of security, economic recovery and the strengthening of democracy. Even though it did not attract as much aid and assistance as had been hoped, it produced tangible results in all three fields, contributing significantly to enhanced stability in that part of the world. The United Nations, as one of the participants in the Stability Pact's work, did not exercise its role to the fullest possible extent. Lessons learned — successes and failures alike — could be put to good use in other parts of the world that are plagued with problems relating to post-conflict stability, economic recovery and confidence-building.

Humanitarian and reconstruction aid, no matter how generous and far-reaching, cannot match the strategic importance of foreign direct investment. The essential prerequisite for foreign direct investment is a stable and democratic environment with stimulating macroeconomic measures, which is often lacking in countries in dire need of such investment. Therefore, development assistance, especially in the areas of capacity- and institution-building, should closely follow humanitarian assistance and post-conflict country rebuilding. This is the best possible investment in the stability of the countries and regions concerned. It is a weapon in the fight against a terrorism-infested environment — a weapon as powerful as a well-conducted military action.

Let me also point out under this item that my delegation welcomes the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Participation of volunteers, 'White Helmets', in the activities of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and technical cooperation for development". As a former recipient country, we are well aware of the important work of the "White Helmets" and other United Nations volunteers. We join those delegations that are ready to consider a better integration of volunteer activities into the United Nations system in order to be able to profit from within the existing resources of the opportunities offered by a well-established system.

With regard to enhanced cooperation between the United Nations and all relevant partners, in particular the private sector, my delegation welcomes the report of the Secretary-General and supports further cooperation in this field. We commend the role that the World Summit on Sustainable Development has played in enhancing the task of partnerships for the United

Nations system in support of United Nations goals. We support the recommendation made in the report of bringing under the same umbrella the Global Compact Office and the United Nations Fund for International Partnerships into one Partnership Office, within existing resources.

As we move into a phase of implementation of these complex and interrelated goals, it is essential that the United Nations show that it can provide practical orientations on issues that are of the utmost concern to people everywhere. A more substantive and interactive relationship should be developed between the Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, as it would provide practical orientation to the international community in the follow-up to major conferences. Therefore, it would be important to maximize synergy between the Economic and Social Council and the Second and Third Committees, as well as between the Bureaux of the two Committees. To that end, we look forward to participating in the discussion of the indicative programme of work of the Second Committee to have it reflect the outcomes of recent major conferences and summits.

Finally, let me conclude by saying that, during the current session of the General Assembly, there has been a sense of expectation that this work in strengthening the Organization will be energized by engaging in a spirit of constructive dialogue on all of the above areas, with a view to strengthening the role of the United Nations as a leading institution in the multilateral arena. The Croatian delegation will try to contribute as much as possible towards that end through its Vice-Presidents in the Fourth and Second Committees and through an active approach in the forthcoming debate on the reforms of our Organization.

Finally, I would like to state that Croatia aligns itself with the statement of the European Union delivered this morning by the Italian European Union presidency.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item. The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 12.

Agenda item 40

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

Report of the Secretary-General (A/58/344)

(a) Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/58/89, A/58/434)

(b) Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/58/133, A/58/244, A/58/225, A/58/273, A/58/280, A/58/285, A/58/286, A/58/358)

(c) Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster

Report of the Secretary-General (A/58/332)

(d) Participation of volunteers, "White Helmets", in the activities of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and technical cooperation for development

Report of the Secretary-General (A/58/320)

(e) Assistance to the Palestinian people

Report of the Secretary-General (A/58/88 and Corr.1)

Mr. Bennouna (Morocco): I am very proud to speak again on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on the very sensitive item on United Nations humanitarian assistance.

(*spoke in French*)

As members are aware, the question of strengthening the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance is an extremely sensitive issue, on which we ourselves have found it difficult to coordinate our action in the Group of 77 (G-77) and

China. Coordination at the global level is indeed difficult.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General Kofi Annan for the documents to which the President has just referred. These documents submitted to us assist us greatly in our efforts to coordinate the work of the United Nations in providing humanitarian assistance.

The Group of 77 and China believes particularly that the report submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 57/152, on international cooperation in humanitarian assistance following natural disasters, from the relief phase to the development phase, is an essential report. We will focus our statement on that report.

While it is true that the international community can play a very important role in the area of natural disasters, I wish to repeat what I said this morning. We cannot address United Nations humanitarian assistance without recalling how traumatized we all were by the tragic attack of 19 August, the target of which was the United Nations. It was an attack that, in a way, struck at the image that we all have of the Organization. These tragic events therefore compel us to review our role and to channel our work clearly. These events also prompt us to work to strengthen protection of United Nations staff, associated personnel and local staff, who do outstanding work in the field. An international convention has been adopted in this regard and is entering into force. We will now have to work to effectively protect United Nations personnel everywhere in the world.

Another thing that my Group wishes to recall is that the United Nations, if it is to be effective, must reach out to people. It cannot lock itself up in offices or behind ramparts. That openness is what United Nations work in the field is about.

The problem of natural disasters is crucially important to the international community, particularly, to the least developed countries. When these disasters occur, their impact on affected populations is long lasting, as it is on economic and social development and environmental protection. It is therefore up to us to determine how the international community can more effectively deal with these types of situations, which can have a lasting effect on the development of the least developed countries.

For the Group of 77 and China, the principle guidelines contained in the annex to resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991 are, and should remain, the basis of all responses to humanitarian emergency requests for assistance. These principles, in fact, should continue to allow us to play a fundamental role in the deployment of United Nations humanitarian assistance and assistance provided by other players, whether non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or other entities in the field.

In this context, I would like to recall that the State affected has the primary responsibility in the organization and development of humanitarian assistance. It is the affected State's responsibility, and it must call for international assistance and accept this humanitarian assistance. It has a fundamental role to play. But it is important for us, as the United Nations and the international community, to help such a State strengthen its capacities at the national and local levels and to foster closer cooperation between the affected State and the United Nations system and other humanitarian organizations. The States whose peoples are in need of emergency humanitarian assistance should facilitate the work of the humanitarian organizations, in particular, by providing security for the delivery of food, shelter and medical care.

As the Secretary-General pointed out in his report, we have seen during the last few years a significant increase in the number of natural disasters of which the poorest countries are the primary victims. Faced with this fact, the Group of 77 and China believes that it is vital to act first in terms of prevention. It is, in fact, essential to give priority to reducing what has been called vulnerability, through a global approach based on a greater effort at international cooperation. This means a strengthening of capacities, to transfer the appropriate technologies and to develop a system of advance warning in order to identify and predict natural disasters and possible disasters of a human origin. There are natural disasters and disasters that have a human origin.

In this context, the Group of 77 and China would like to reiterate the importance of strengthening international cooperation in all phases of a catastrophe, ranging from initial relief and mitigation to assistance for development, through a proper use of multilateral channels and the provision of adequate resources.

Mr. Kirn (Slovenia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

There are countries where, following a natural disaster, people sometimes remain in tents for months and even years. In this context, the Group of 77 and China welcomes the fact that the resolution adopted in the framework of the Economic and Social Council's humanitarian segment last July particularly encouraged donors to allot humanitarian assistance on the basis of need, with a view to ensuring a more equitable distribution of humanitarian assistance across all emergencies, including those of a protracted nature.

It is true that resources are often abundant in humanitarian situations that have benefited from wide media coverage. By contrast, significantly less in the way of resources is provided, unfortunately, to certain geographical areas, or when the relief phase gives way to the development phase.

It is appropriate to reiterate here that contributions for humanitarian assistance should never be granted to the detriment of resources that are provided as cooperation for development. When I say that there is media coverage, I mean that when television screens show natural disasters, there is always a strong reaction from the community. But, when television and other media leave and no longer show what is happening, we get the impression that nothing is happening any longer, whereas obviously people's hardships do continue.

In his report, the Secretary-General refers to the coordination efforts now underway between the United Nations Development Programme, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. This coordination should be strengthened with a view to advancing the implementation of provisions related to vulnerability, risk assessment and disaster management. All of this is contained in the Plan of Implementation that was adopted in Johannesburg at the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

I would like at this point to mention the use of remote-sensing technologies, both in space and land-based, which have become very important for the prediction and mitigation of natural disasters. As we know, access to scientific progress in outer space should be access for all humankind, because such research — at least, basic research in that category — is considered to be the heritage of humankind. Unfortunately, developing countries often do not have access this very costly remote-sensing technology. It is therefore essential to encourage a transfer to the developing countries of these technologies that can save human lives.

The Secretary-General, in his report, also referred to the need to take into account the special needs of the most vulnerable populations. The Group of 77 and China reiterate on this occasion that the international community must appropriately and on a priority basis take into account the specific needs of the least developed countries affected by natural disasters. This should be done in the framework of what I would call a real duty to provide assistance, the duty of all those who have the means to come to the aid of those who are in danger. We may call this an obligation, of sorts, to assist a community in danger.

As in previous sessions, the Group of 77 and China will submit a draft resolution on international cooperation on humanitarian assistance following natural disasters, ranging from relief through development. The Group of 77 is delighted at the growing support that this resolution is receiving and hopes that it will encounter even broader international consensus this year. This would constitute a real message of hope for us and numerous people the world over as they come to believe in this duty of international solidarity.

Mr. Spatafora (Italy): I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Union. The acceding countries Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, the associated countries Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) country Iceland, member of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union sees today's debate as an important opportunity to focus the attention of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session on humanitarian issues: an area where the leading role of the United Nations is uncontested and with respect to which the international community and those in need have high expectations. I wish to take this opportunity to renew the European Union's commitment to strengthening United Nations action in this area, especially at a time when the number of humanitarian

crises is increasing and when we are faced with growing challenges in terms of resources, security and access.

I wish to express, on behalf of the European Union, our sorrow at the deaths of personnel who lost their lives bringing relief to the poor and the needy. The safety and security of humanitarian personnel working in the field is a key issue for the European Union, and must be addressed effectively. In this regard, we condemn all cases of violence against humanitarian personnel, including abductions, such as the case of the Médecins Sans Frontières worker Arjan Erkel, abducted in Dagestan in August 2002.

However, condemning deliberate attacks on humanitarian personnel is not enough. The international community must act jointly and decisively to end the culture of impunity wherever it exists. In this regard, the European Union welcomes the Security Council's adoption of resolution 1502 (2003) on the protection of humanitarian personnel, and urges States to fully comply with its recommendations. The European Union also welcomes the Secretary-General's recent expression of support with regard to the issue of security in the field, and looks forward to the concrete initiatives that will follow the current review phase.

The European Union is convinced that the International Criminal Court can play an important role in deterring intentional attacks on humanitarian personnel, as well as serious violations of international humanitarian law. We warmly welcome the start of the Court Prosecutor's work, and reiterate our full support for it.

While stressing the need for increased security, the European Union also wishes to underline the importance of having United Nations staff present in crisis situations. The international community expects the United Nations to be physically present in order to provide not only humanitarian assistance but also necessary humanitarian protection for those in need. A central challenge is achieving a balance between minimizing the security risk and providing a meaningful humanitarian presence. We strongly urge all Governments and parties to armed conflict and those in post-conflict situations to cooperate fully with the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies and organizations in providing safe and unimpeded access to vulnerable populations.

The General Assembly must consider several important issues in today's debate, including strengthening the coordination of humanitarian assistance, as well as specific regional and country situations. The European Union would like to see greater emphasis on pressing thematic issues and situations relevant to the humanitarian community. We are convinced that the sectoral policies and guidelines that the General Assembly is expected to produce should also be applicable to specific country situations.

The European Union welcomes the outcome of the humanitarian segment of last July's Economic and Social Council session. Once again, that segment provided appropriate guidance on a number of important issues: the protection of civilians in complex emergencies; sexual abuse and exploitation in humanitarian crises; the role of affected countries and communities in facing emergencies; the role of military assets in the provision of humanitarian assistance; the transition from relief to development; and the respective roles of States, United Nations agencies and donors in providing a coordinated and effective response. The European Union looks forward to further developing humanitarian policies and guidelines on those issues in the wider context of the General Assembly.

The European Union provides about half of all global humanitarian assistance. In 2002 alone, European Union member States collectively contributed more than 2 billion euros, while the European Commission, through its humanitarian office, allocated more than 537 million euros to projects in more than 60 countries. Although humanitarian assistance has more than doubled in recent years, however, the growing number of crises that the international community has to face puts enormous pressure on donors. Iraq, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Southern Africa, Haiti and Sri Lanka are just some examples of high-profile emergencies. The humanitarian community has been required to ensure maximum coordination and coherence of all available instruments. Maximizing the use of limited resources and ensuring their equitable allocation based on need are the main challenges that we currently face.

The debate recently launched on "good donorship" and the harmonization of procedures may contribute significantly to meeting those challenges. The European Union is willing to go into greater depth

in this debate, together with other donors and partners, so as to improve the effectiveness and coordination of humanitarian assistance. We expect the United Nations, particularly the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), to play a major role in that process.

The European Union furthermore believes that the issue of the transition from relief to development should be considered in an integrated manner involving both humanitarian and development actors. We also addressed that matter earlier this morning.

Advocacy is another important area that requires the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to take a leadership role. In so-called forgotten emergencies, in particular, there is a clear need for a coherent advocacy and public information strategy. In that respect I fully support the comments made by Ambassador Bennouna earlier.

A more specific advocacy role is also needed in relation to the most vulnerable groups, particularly women and children, internally displaced persons and civilians in armed conflict. Such a role will require more effective coordination among OCHA, the Security Council, the Department for Peacekeeping Operations and the various agencies, funds and programmes operating in the field.

In that context, the European Union commends the indispensable advocacy role played by civil society. The role of non-governmental organizations has been instrumental in bringing about a more forceful response from the United Nations to humanitarian crises in many parts of the world, especially Africa. Their role in providing humanitarian assistance is also extremely important. The European Union will continue to support the activities of non-governmental organizations, as well as of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the strengthening of the partnership and coordination between the United Nations and civil society in the humanitarian field.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate the European Union's full support for the work of the United Nations in the humanitarian area and its readiness to engage with all stakeholders in finding ways and means to improve the effectiveness, coordination, coherence and consistency of our humanitarian response. We very much rely on the leading role of OCHA in this respect, and I wish the new Emergency Relief Coordinator, Under-Secretary-General Jan Egeland, every success in his new and challenging position.

Mr. Løvald (Norway): In late June, Annalena Tonelli received a 2003 Nansen Refugee Award in recognition of decades of quiet devotion and selflessness in helping the poorest of the poor in remote and difficult places in Somalia. She touched the lives of thousands of people. Yet two weeks ago, she was brutally murdered outside her hospital in Borama. With the 19 August massacre at the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad — which caused the tragic deaths of Sergio Vieira de Mello and 21 other humanitarians — still fresh in our minds, the safety of humanitarian workers has been moved to the top of the international agenda. The disturbing trend of blatant disrespect for humanitarian workers that the Secretary-General pointed out in his report to the Economic and Social Council this summer — a trend that has been further documented in two reports to the General Assembly at this session — has been exacerbated by the unprecedented magnitude and anti-United Nations hostility of the Baghdad massacre.

The deliberate targeting of United Nations and humanitarian personnel for violent action is alarming, and calls for a concerted effort to reverse a trend which runs counter to the most basic tenets of international humanitarian law. Efforts must be intensified at all levels, from normative work and practical security measures to punitive action against the perpetrators and the restoration of general respect for the inviolability of the humanitarian space.

It is, for instance, time to put renewed energy into strengthening the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel. The reinforcement of the United Nations security management system and the Inter-Agency Security Management Network, and its increasing cooperation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), must continue.

Stronger action must be taken by all States to ensure that any threat or act of violence committed against humanitarian personnel on their territory is investigated fully and the perpetrators brought to justice. A climate of impunity is, quite simply, unacceptable.

It has been said that the best protection for humanitarian workers is local understanding and backing. Something has clearly gone wrong when United Nations and humanitarian personnel are viewed

as representing an enemy that may be attacked anywhere as part of a global or ideological struggle. Humanitarian efforts are becoming viewed as part of other agendas. This raises fundamental questions for the United Nations and the humanitarian community, such as how to avoid being identified with political military actions that are being resisted. When are they to retreat before extremist groups and say no to helping people in need because of unreasonable risks to their own staff, when locally recruited humanitarian personnel, in fact, account for the majority of casualties? Thus the international community, in working through national counterparts and structures, makes them, in reality, substitute soft targets.

States, and perhaps donor States in particular, cannot ignore those difficult questions, but they call for a revival, rather than a revision, of the humanitarian principles of humanity, independence, neutrality and impartiality. We need to hold the banner of humanitarianism high, to quote the new Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Humanitarianism is a universal value and a noble commitment that must have an independent space in international relations. It embodies compassion for fellow human beings in need and, as such, deserves to be respected and protected. Humanitarian workers are flag-bearers against hunger, thirst, illness, deprivation, abuse, neglect, exploitation and despair. They carry with them food, water, medicines, shelter, care, empathy and hope. Their mission of saving lives, alleviating suffering and maintaining and restoring human dignity is as imperative as ever.

While the safety of humanitarian staff and their unimpeded access to vulnerable populations are operational prerequisites, we must also continue our longstanding and tedious work to improve the instruments or tools that they have at their disposal to meet the enormous need for their services.

Over the past few years, a great deal of progress has been made in enhancing the coordination of humanitarian assistance. The consolidated appeals process is well established as a coordination tool. Nevertheless, there is still room for improvement in terms of greater and more systematic integration of a gender perspective and an increased emphasis on including an HIV/AIDS component in all relevant programming areas.

As we know, consolidated appeals process advocacy and especially its fundraising function continue to pose a major challenge. Overall, the volume of humanitarian assistance is still too small compared to the need for it, and its distribution is far from equitable. Some high-profile priority cases receive the bulk of the assistance, while some emergencies seem to be more or less forgotten.

Norway is encouraged by the Emergency Relief Coordinator's resolution to give priority to those forgotten emergencies and to the pressing need for a durable solution to them. But significant increases in the total level of assistance will be required for that purpose.

The consolidated appeals process is about team-building and teamwork within the United Nations family and between the United Nations and recipient States. It is also increasingly about reaching out to include other humanitarian actors in order to forge a stronger common humanitarian agenda. This collaborative approach has some way to go before it can be described as successful in the field. If it is successful, it may well have a decisive impact on efforts to protect and assist, particularly as concerns internally displaced persons, ensuring them a more predictable response from the United Nations system.

Teamwork and team-building are also very important when it comes to bridging the relief-to-development gap. It is very encouraging to observe how the "4-R" concept of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) — repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction — has become accepted terminology in the development community.

Recent studies — and they are numerous in the field of humanitarian assistance — have drawn our attention to the fact that much can be done to enhance the efficiency of humanitarian assistance through better coordination, not just among implementing partners, but also among donors.

The Stockholm Conference on Good Humanitarian Donorship, held last June, adopted principles and created a plan of action in order to reverse today's reality, in which the totality of donors' efforts is less than the sum of the individual parts. An ambitious implementation effort has been started under Canada's leadership, and we look forward to participating in the pilot project envisaged for Burundi

in 2004 and for the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2005.

Whether we are dealing with good donorship, coordination of humanitarian assistance or the safety of humanitarian workers, we must never lose sight of the fact that the impact of our action or inaction is very real for those of our fellow human beings who need our help.

Annalena Tonelli attributed her motivation to

> "my invincible trust in humanity, my unshakeable hope that men and women of goodwill from all corners of the world would decide to fight for those who were not given the opportunity to live a life worthy of being called a life".

That should be the essence of our humanitarian mission.

Mr. Atta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Egypt would like to reaffirm the importance of the General Assembly's assuming a leading role in following up and evaluating humanitarian assistance activities. Egypt calls on the United Nations, its organs and its specialized agencies to help those States that need to build their national institutional capacities. The United Nations must also focus on achieving the necessary coordination among all humanitarian assistance entities — be they United Nations bodies or other relevant organizations — working in the field, in order to meet the challenges posed by natural disasters and the consequences of war through the implementation of an integrated approach to deal with natural disasters at all stages, from early warning to relief to reconstruction and development.

Egypt calls on those States that are financially able to do so, and on the international financial institutions, to increase their contributions in order to fund humanitarian relief and assistance activities, in fulfilment of the principles of international solidarity and interdependence, and with the letter and spirit of the Charter of the United Nations.

Egypt once again calls upon the international community to intervene with urgency to deal with the humanitarian disaster faced by the Palestinian people and with their subjection to practices that have led to unprecedented suffering in the occupied Palestinian territory.

The report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/58/1) makes clear reference to the closures and curfews imposed by the Israeli occupation forces, which has led to the economic paralysis that has left more than 1 million in poverty. The report also refers to the military operations that have left approximately 10,000 Palestinians homeless.

Egypt fully appreciates the positive role played by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which has provided assistance to more than 4 million refugees. We would like to thank all organizations and agencies providing humanitarian relief and assistance to the Palestinian people. We call upon donor countries to increase their support for those efforts by providing the necessary financing and assistance in order to fill the gap in UNRWA's budget, meet the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people and take a very firm stance against all actions impeding the delivery of assistance to those in need.

My delegation calls upon the Secretariat to include in the report of the Secretary-General to be submitted next year to the General Assembly and to the Economic and Social Council an analytical presentation of the efforts of the United Nations with respect to the humanitarian situation in the occupied territories because of the difficulties faced in providing that international humanitarian assistance and to suggest solutions to those difficulties so that the General Assembly and the Security Council can take appropriate measures.

Egypt calls upon the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to coordinate and cooperate with UNRWA in order to follow up on the humanitarian situation of the Palestinians under Israeli occupation, including the situation of the refugees, because they are an integral segment of those civilians who need humanitarian help.

Egypt believes that it is a timely priority that the United Nations assume an active role in expanding and ensuring the protection of humanitarian relief workers, and we underscore the importance of not limiting that protection to legal aspects alone. The United Nations should focus on the need for the political resolve of all States, whether or not they are a party to an agreement to host such operations. I would mention here the report of the Secretary-General, which shows that most of the victims were Palestinian UNRWA workers. That

fact compels us to give sufficient importance to extending protection to those relief operations that are more exposed to dangers than other operations and to relief workers whose security and safety are threatened.

Mr. Zhang Yishan (China): The Chinese delegation wishes to thank the Secretariat for the series of reports of the Secretary-General on this item. My delegation supports the statement made by Morocco, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and is ready to take an active and constructive part in the discussion of this item and in the consultations for drafting resolutions.

The Chinese delegation would like to take this opportunity to welcome Mr. Jan Egeland, the newly appointed Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs. We also wish to express our appreciation and admiration to his predecessor, Mr. Kenzo Oshima and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), under his leadership, for a job well done in coordinating United Nations humanitarian assistance activities.

The Chinese delegation agrees with the general review and analysis made by the Secretary-General in his report (A/58/344) on the overall humanitarian situation in 2002-2003. During the past year, the world has witnessed frequent outbreaks of natural disasters and armed conflicts, as well as the growing threat of the spread of HIV/AIDS and the aggravation of the problem of refugees and internally displaced persons. As a consequence, humanitarian assistance is facing more serious challenges than ever before.

In order to better respond to and overcome these challenges, it is necessary to reiterate once again the guidelines established by resolution 46/182 on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance. The United Nations and the international community should consistently follow those guidelines in providing humanitarian assistance to the affected countries. Humanity, neutrality and impartiality should be maintained, as should full respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of recipient countries. Humanitarian assistance activities should be carried out with the consent of, and at the request of, affected countries, without any conditionality.

The Chinese delegation believes that adequate funding is a necessary condition and a basic requirement for the success of any humanitarian assistance endeavour and for a smooth transition from relief to development. As a tool of coordination, strategic planning and advocacy, the Consolidated Appeals Process has consistently played a significant role in humanitarian assistance funding. However, over recent years, the proportion of funds made available through this channel has been steadily declining. This situation has drawn close attention from all sides. We are seriously concerned and hope that efforts in this field will be further enhanced. We repeat our appeal to those countries that are in a position to do so to actively mobilize resources for humanitarian assistance.

The issue of the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and the protection of United Nations personnel has attracted increasing attention. As the Secretary-General indicates in his report, United Nations personnel continue to face major threats to their safety and security in all regions of operation; physical violence directed against them is the most dangerous of all. Two months ago, an explosion at the United Nations office in Iraq took the lives of more than 20 United Nations personnel on duty, including Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq and former Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs. Here, we would like once again to express our deep condolences.

China is also a country prone to natural disasters. This year, it has suffered a succession of floods and earthquakes which have taken a heavy economic toll. Nevertheless, the Chinese Government, within its capacity, has continued to give through bilateral channels all forms of assistance to other developing countries. It has also stepped up its emergency humanitarian and disaster relief assistance efforts. This year, our country has provided food assistance to affected countries in Africa and emergency humanitarian supplies to refugees, as well as to earthquake- and flood-affected areas in Africa and Asia. The Chinese Government expresses its support for the relevant report and recommendations on providing special economic assistance to individual countries under this item. Let me conclude by expressing thanks to OCHA for its concern and assistance to China in our fight against the earthquakes and floods this year.

Mr. Staehelin (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): The Secretary-General's reports describe, in a concise and structured manner, the complex reality faced in the

deployment of international humanitarian aid. Events that have taken place since the Economic and Social Council's recent substantive session have made evident how numerous and significant are the obstacles faced by international humanitarian assistance.

We have not forgotten the unspeakable acts perpetrated against the United Nations offices and personnel in Baghdad last August 19, not to mention the deliberate attacks that have cost the lives of delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Iraq and in Afghanistan and of national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies staff elsewhere in the world. We also know that employees of humanitarian non-governmental organizations also fall victim to abduction or assassination, and that these organizations must deal with all kinds of pressure.

All these acts are unacceptable, and the perpetrators must be punished without delay, in accordance with national legislation and international obligations, such as those laid out in the provisions of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, an instrument that went into effect over 15 months ago.

Switzerland attaches utmost priority to preserving space for humanitarian assistance in all circumstances and without exception. Respect for international humanitarian law by all parties to a conflict, be they States or armed groups, is pivotal to the preservation of this space. As a State party to, and a depositary of, the Geneva Conventions, Switzerland invites all States that have not yet done so to ratify these Conventions' Additional Protocols.

We must furthermore firmly reiterate the need to guarantee unimpeded access by humanitarian personnel to those in distress. In this regard, the neutrality, impartiality and independence of humanitarian action must be completely respected. When we say "independence", we mean the autonomy of humanitarian objectives in relation to political, economic or military objectives or any other objective one might have in areas where humanitarian action takes place.

We equally feel that specific efforts must be made at all levels in order to improve the protection afforded to civilian populations, especially women and children, who are the primary victims of current crises and conflicts. Where the prevention of human suffering fails, the humanitarian imperative to relieve it remains. Still, the commitment expected of humanitarian organizations cannot, in this sense, replace the efforts of the international community aimed at preventing the need for, or the prolonging of, international humanitarian aid.

In disaster or complex emergency situations, the primary role of humanitarian organizations must also be asserted vis-à-vis the use of military resources, as prescribed by the Oslo Guidelines adopted on the subject in 1994 and 2003.

The coordination of international humanitarian assistance falls to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), newly placed under the direction of Mr. Jan Egeland, to whom we express our support in the performance of his difficult and complex tasks. Over the coming months, Switzerland will commit itself to strengthening OCHA's role as the mainspring of international humanitarian coordination, notably by means of a transparent dialogue between donor countries and members of the Group of 77, be they directly or indirectly affected by disasters, crises or conflicts.

Our aim will also be to place the financing of OCHA's activities on a more solid and foreseeable footing, with a view to increasing the regular budgeted contribution of the United Nations. We will also be committed to optimizing strategic planning and coordination mechanisms in the field, as well as to the efficiency and effectiveness of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Finally, there will be a need to review the means for financing contingency planning for emergency situations. The importance of such planning is crucial, whether we are dealing with natural or technological disasters, crises, or conflicts.

The neglect of human suffering by political, security or economic agendas, as well as by the media, should be our first and foremost challenge. The credibility of the international community is at stake.

On a different note, we look forward to the recommendations of the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Development Group on issues concerning the transition from relief to development. We are, indeed, convinced of the urgent need to find concrete ways and means to improve the international response to situations of transition, so as to avoid their turning into chronic crises.

On the subject of transition, we should like to encourage humanitarian and development organizations to intensify their cooperation so that the HIV/AIDS epidemic's short- and long-term consequences are considered in their respective programmes and projects. In a high-level meeting devoted to the subject, right here in the framework of the General Assembly last 22 September, an intensified commitment to the fight against HIV/AIDS was made. The theme will also be high on the agenda of the upcoming twenty-eighth International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, to be held in Geneva from 2 to 6 December.

Mr. Isakov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): In his address to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session, the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, highlighted the moral and political importance of United Nations humanitarian activities for millions of people suffering from hunger, disease, natural disasters and conflicts. It is precisely in this area where the United Nations has achieved real results, bringing it further political and moral authority. To a greater extent, this is a logical outcome of the consistent adherence by the United Nations to the fundamental principles of humanitarian assistance: neutrality, humanity, impartiality and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. At the same time, it is the outcome of the undeniable comparative advantages of the United Nations and its unique legitimacy, inter alia when coordinating multilateral action in the field.

The Russian Federation commends the work done by the United Nations system to improve the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance. We note the lead role played in this process by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Coordination mechanisms, in particular the Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeals, continue to do effective work and are constantly improving their work. An important job is also being done by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the former United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Kenzo Oshima, for the great amount of useful work he did, and to wish his successor, Mr. Jan Egeland, every success in his crucial, difficult but extremely noble, work.

In the humanitarian area, extremely serious challenges have emerged. The problem of forecasting and increasing preparedness for adequate response to emergency situations is becoming ever more important. Increasingly, the United Nations is facing complex humanitarian situations aggravated by the results of conflicts, epidemics and natural disasters. This requires a comprehensive, integrated and coordinated reaction, one that often goes beyond traditional short-term humanitarian operations. It is precisely for that reason that it is important to focus on the transition from humanitarian assistance to reconstruction and development assistance.

An effective and smooth transition is the key to the success of international humanitarian efforts, post-conflict peace-building and the building of a foundation for socio-economic development. It is particularly important that there be coordinated efforts with the lead role played by the United Nations. Clearly, the effectiveness of these efforts will depend directly on the amount of resources provided.

We believe, therefore, that all major participants in the reconstruction process, including United Nations programmes, funds and specialized agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions, should have some reserve capacity that could, if necessary, be drawn upon prior to a reaction from the donor community, which often is not prompt enough and is sometimes inadequate. We also believe that in post-conflict situations, particularly during the transition to peace-building and reconstruction, there is great scope for intensifying productive interaction between the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council.

One serious problem still remains which is providing for the safety and security of humanitarian personnel. The tragic events of recent months that took place in Iraq are another reminder of this. Among the specific tasks to improve international humanitarian cooperation, the following can be highlighted: better preparedness and improved effectiveness of emergency planning and management mechanisms; strengthening the regional presence of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in disaster-prone areas; improving emergency warning networks in the case of major emergency situations in order to coordinate national rescue services and the use of up-to-date rescue and other specialized technologies in international rescue operations.

We support the proposal of the United Nations Secretary-General contained in his report on the work of the Organization, regarding the need to improve the operational mechanisms of interaction, and to strengthen the synergy between the national, regional and international efforts to deal with the consequences of natural disasters.

Russia has increased its contribution to United Nations humanitarian operations and is gradually restoring its donor capacity. During the first six months of 2003, Russia's Ministry of Emergency Situations provided humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia, Eritrea, Algeria, Ecuador and Tajikistan, as well as to Iraq, totalling more than $3 million. This year the Russian Government adopted a decision to give voluntary contributions to the World Food Programme (WFP) totalling $11 million and $2 million to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Together with this, Russia is prepared to make available highly qualified human and technological potential from our Ministry, for United Nations humanitarian operations involving emergency situations. We think this solid potential will be put to good use by the humanitarian agencies.

International post-Chernobyl cooperation remains particularly important. We think that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) should remain the lead link in the infrastructure providing international post-Chernobyl cooperation. We welcome the fact that United Nations Under-Secretary-General Egeland has confirmed this point. We take note of the launch, in June 2003, of the International Chernobyl Research and Information Network and we commend the creation of the Chernobyl Forum under the aegis of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Post-Chernobyl cooperation has constantly been the focus of attention of the leaders of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The latest CIS summit held in Yalta in September 2003 appealed to United Nations Member States to proclaim 26 April the day of the Chernobyl disaster, an international day to commemorate the victims of radiation disasters and catastrophes. This appeal is reflected in the draft resolution that the Russian Federation, Belarus and Ukraine intend to submit at the current session of the United Nations General Assembly. We hope that all delegations will support this noble initiative.

Ms. Barghouti (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): The discussion of the Assembly concerning agenda item 40 (e): Assistance to the Palestinian people, comes at a time when the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, is seriously and unprecedentedly deteriorating, in the economic, social, cultural and environmental areas, as a result of the continued Israeli occupation, the intensification of the occupation's coercive and oppressive policies, measures and practices against the Palestinian people, the Palestinian National Authority and the elected leadership.

In this context, my delegation wishes to express its thanks and gratitude to the United Nations Secretary-General for his comprehensive report submitted under this item (A/58/88), which deals with the difficult and deteriorating conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories, the negative impact of Israeli policies and measures on the living conditions of the Palestinian people and the acute economic and human crises the Palestinian people are facing. The summary of the report indicates that,

> "Tight internal and external closures, widespread curfews, incursions and other measures taken by the Israeli military led to a further worsening of economic indicators and to an increase in poverty and unemployment levels among Palestinians. The capacity of the Palestinian Authority was diminished just as needs increased." (A/58/88)

Similarly, the report refers to observations made by the Personal Humanitarian Envoy of the Secretary-General, Catherine Bertini, in August 2002, indicating that the main causes of the humanitarian and economic crises of the Palestinians have been,

> "Israel's systematic imposition of severe restrictions on the movement of Palestinian goods and people across borders and within the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This strict closure policy has effectively divided the occupied Palestinian territory into approximately 50 isolated pockets." (A/58/88, para. 6)

In this context, the World Bank submitted a report, published in March 2003 and entitled "Two Years of Intifada, Closures and Palestinian Economic Crisis: An Assessment", which addressed the blockade, closures and the Palestinian economic crisis after 27 months of the intifada, to the meetings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank held in

Dubai at the end of September. The World Bank warned of the financial collapse of the Palestinian Authority at a time when the Palestinian people are suffering from increased poverty, destitution and unemployment. The report adds that the continued Israeli blockade of the Palestinian territories threatens to have even more severe consequences in the light of the state of repression that the Palestinian people are undergoing.

We are gravely concerned at the report's statistics showing already poor conditions for the Palestinians with respect to employment becoming even worse. Moreover, there is a further drop-off in investment and an increased level of debt owed by the Palestinian Authority to private companies. The report states that losses to the Palestinian gross domestic product after three years of the intifada amounted to $5.2 billion, that the per capita income of Palestinians fell 46 per cent since 1999, that 60 per cent of the population faces poverty and that more than 75 per cent of the population of the Gaza Strip are very poor.

It is quite clear that the worsening crisis and its causes stem from the continued Israeli policies of blockades, checkpoints, settler colonialism, land confiscation and the construction of the expansionist wall, which has resulted in the confiscation of thousands of dunums and the ruining of the lives of tens of thousands of Palestinian civilians. Since September 2000, Israel has escalated its aggressive bloody campaign against the Palestinian people, which has led to the death of 2,600 Palestinian martyrs and the injury of more than 36,000 others, some of whom were left completely disabled. Furthermore, occupation forces have bombed and destroyed several homes and private and public facilities, uprooted trees and deliberately destroyed the infrastructure, including roads and water and sanitation networks. These Israeli practices against the Palestinian people are war crimes and constitute flagrant violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

We call on the international community to intensify pressure on Israel, the occupying Power, to implement its commitments in accordance with the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention and in compliance with the will of the international community that calls on Israel to put an end to its aggression, destruction and racist settlement policy. It is important to recall the collective and individual responsibility of the parties to the Convention to respect and guarantee respect for the Convention's provisions in all cases.

My delegation takes this opportunity to express its special gratitude to our brothers in the Arab States who received many seriously wounded Palestinians and who provided emergency assistance and medical supplies. Most importantly, they provided crucial assistance to maintain the functioning infrastructure of the Palestinian Authority and of the Palestinian population as a whole.

We also wish to thank the other friendly States, foremost among them the European Union and Japan, that provided humanitarian and general assistance to our people. We also thank the donor countries and the non-governmental organizations that provided emergency humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people. In that respect, we must seriously counter Israeli measures against these States and institutions, the deliberate killing they are subjected to and the damage that Israel inflicts on their facilities. We call on the international community to provide protection to those institutions, commensurate with the requirements of international humanitarian law.

We emphasize that donor countries and United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), should continue to provide all kinds of support and assistance to the Palestinian people, who have been blockaded by the Israeli occupation, in order to improve their living conditions, to alleviate their suffering, to revive the peace process and to return to the negotiating table.

We agree with the conclusions of the aforementioned report of the Secretary-General that while international assistance might alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people, only a comprehensive political settlement ending occupation can put an end to the real humanitarian and economic crisis faced by a growing number of people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The realization of a comprehensive and just peace, as well as peace and security for the countries of our region, requires not only Israel's total withdrawal from all occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem and the occupied Syrian Golan Heights, but also recognition of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian State in their own territory. If those objectives are not achieved,

no progress can be made in the peace process and no one can talk about regional development or cooperation with Israel, the occupying Power.

In that respect, we stress the role of the United Nations in achieving this just and comprehensive peace, based on the permanent responsibility of the United Nations towards the Palestine question. We also stress the importance of the role of the United Nations in providing assistance to the Palestinian people and of that of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. Rudenko (Ukraine) (*spoke in Russian*): I shall speak on agenda item 40 (c), concerning international cooperation with respect to the Chernobyl disaster. First, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report on this agenda item, contained in document A/58/332. Despite the fact that 17 years have passed since the disaster, the situation in the affected territories of Ukraine, Belarus and Russia remains complex. As the representative of the Ukraine parliamentary committee dealing with the task of protecting our people from the effects of the Chernobyl accident, I would add that the situation remains extremely complicated.

With the passage of time — particularly since the closing of the Chernobyl nuclear station and our country's voluntary act for the sake of future generations — for the many who have no direct contact with it, the problem of Chernobyl is gradually losing its acuteness. But for Ukraine, Chernobyl signifies the more than 3 million people who suffered from that disaster and its consequences, including 1.2 million children. Chernobyl signifies the 160,000 people from 170 towns and villages who had to leave their homes and be relocated outside the areas of radioactive contamination. Chernobyl signifies the towns, villages, forests and fields — an area of more than 4,000 square kilometres — that are dead.

Three years ago, Ukraine did its duty and closed the Chernobyl nuclear power station. We have paid an excessively high price for that station, on three occasions. The first time was when, during the existence of the Soviet Union, despite the will of the Ukrainian people, we were forced to build the nuclear power station. We paid again in 1991, when we had to deal alone with that tragedy that had taken the lives and health of people, poisoned the land and the air and caused massive resettlement. The third time we paid was when, despite the economic difficulties we faced and the difficult situation in the energy sector, we closed that electric power station, which had not exhausted its capacity and for whose operational safety a large amount of money had been spent. We note with regret that complying with the demands of the international community for the speedy closure of Chernobyl actually did more harm than good to Ukraine.

The measures undertaken by Ukraine to mitigate the situation are reflected in the annex to the report of the Secretary-General, and I will therefore not dwell on them in detail. I would like, however, to draw attention to the fact that every year Ukraine spends 5 per cent to 7 per cent of its national budget on dealing with the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. Between 1986 to 2003 we spent more than $12 billion to that end. Ukraine continues to bear — by itself — the main social burden of dealing with the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

We support the appeal made at the recent session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe calling on the United Nations, the countries of the Group of Eight, the European Union and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, to grant, to Ukraine, on an emergency basis, the necessary scientific, technical and economic assistance for urgent action to mitigate the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. The moral aspect of this problem is of enormous importance. Like the representative of Russia, I call upon all delegations to support the initiative of the heads of State of the Commonwealth of Independent States to proclaim 26 April as a day to commemorate the victims of the radiation catastrophes. I appeal to the General Assembly to proclaim that as an international day within the context of the United Nations. We are duty-bound to do that in memory of those who died, as well as for the living. I am also confident that the General Assembly will adopt a resolution on the Chernobyl question, which will give additional impetus to our cooperation in resolving the problem of Chernobyl.

We are grateful to the Secretary-General for the attention that the Organization continues to give to the Chernobyl item, as is borne out by today's discussion and by the documents submitted. I would like to note in particular the efforts made by the Office for the

Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Population Fund.

At the same time, I would like to see real action, rather than mere drafts on paper. One body that does very specific work on Chernobyl is the International Chernobyl Centre for Nuclear Safety, Radioactive Waste and Radioecology. I would also like to take note of the three pilot projects of the Chernobyl Trust Fund, as well as the opening of the international Chernobyl Research and Information Network (ICRIN). We hope that the work done in ICRIN will prove to be just the start of the real work, otherwise it will be hard to explain to the victims the usefulness of the project.

We are deeply alarmed at the situation with regard to the Trust Fund, which, according to our information, in the past year was replenished only from interest on the money in the Fund. In this connection, we must step up our work with the donors regarding the specific projects elaborated by the United Nations during the recovery phase. We need to see innovation and the concretization of the proposals to mobilize resources through the organization of representative international donor conference.

All of the points that I have raised are in response to the question of why we need to keep the item of Chernobyl on the agenda of the General Assembly and continue to consider the problem as a humanitarian disaster, the consequences of which continue to have a negative impact on the lives of people in the entire region — the lives of present and future generations.

Mr. Snowdon (Australia): Tragic events over the past 12 months — disasters, conflicts and terrorist attacks — have cut short the lives of many civilians and injured many others. The resultant widespread grief, distress and displacement have created enormous humanitarian challenges for the United Nations and for the international community. We should all be thankful that there are people who, in order to meet humanitarian needs throughout the world, work selflessly and, not infrequently, put their own safety, security and well-being at risk. That risk has been unfortunately and tragically underlined in Iraq.

The Australian Government condemned in the strongest terms the attack on the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad. I want to pay tribute to the Secretary-General's senior representative in Baghdad, Sergio Vieira De Mello, and his colleagues and express our condolences, sympathy and concern at the senseless injury and loss of life. Australia deplores attacks on humanitarian personnel wherever they occur, and we call upon all parties to ensure the safe and unhindered access of humanitarian personnel to affected civilian populations. There should be no impunity for the perpetrators of such attacks. They must be promptly bought to justice.

Strengthened coordination of United Nations humanitarian and disaster relief assistance will improve its impact and quality on the ground. Consequently, Australia strongly supports the role of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and its efforts to facilitate coordination of the United Nations responses to natural disasters and complex emergencies.

In particular, Australia welcomes the United Nations decision to establish the Joint Logistics Centre, which has provided important logistics support to humanitarian agencies operating in Iraq and to which Australia has provided financial support. Such initiatives significantly improve inter-agency coordination efforts during critical phases of humanitarian response.

However, there remains ample scope for United Nations organizations to improve collaboration with each other and with OCHA, both at Headquarters and in the field. In this regard, we welcome further efforts by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the transitional working group under Carol Bellamy and the United Nations Development Group under Mark Malloch Brown to strengthen coordination frameworks for humanitarian assistance and ensure effective transition to development assistance. Australia, through participation in the Montreux process and the Working Group on OCHA, will remain engaged in efforts to further enhance these frameworks.

Australia attaches particular importance to the protection of civilians in armed conflict, so we were pleased to support a workshop for Pacific States organized by OCHA in June. That workshop successfully raised awareness of global initiatives relating to conflict and improved understanding by those States of their responsibilities and obligations under international law.

We welcome the steps taken by the United Nations over the past year to enhance the protection of

women and children and to prevent their sexual exploitation and abuse. Let us also recognize the capacities of women as effective agents for preventing conflict, rather than just focus on their vulnerabilities.

More generally, we think that aid programmes are well placed to address many of the root causes of conflict and instability and to support durable solutions for those affected. In Australia's case, a specific policy on peace, conflict and development guides our approach and defines the aid programme's role — within broader Government efforts — in preventing, managing and reducing conflict, building peace and assisting post-conflict recovery.

Australia endorsed the conclusions of the June meeting in Stockholm on good humanitarian donorship, and we will seek to apply those principles and good practices within the overall policies set for our aid programme.

Over the past 12 months Australia has responded to many calls for humanitarian assistance, not only in the Asia-Pacific region but also beyond it. Several responses deserve particular mention.

In Solomon Islands, Australia, working with New Zealand and other Pacific Island Forum partners, intervened, at the invitation of the Government of Solomon Islands, to restore law and order. The humanitarian dimension of the intervention is aimed at assisting people displaced through conflict, ethnic tension and the breakdown of law and order. Australia is providing an additional economic assistance package of 25 million Australian dollars for Solomon Islands.

In Timor-Leste, since 2000, Australia has provided A$ 150 million in reconstruction and development assistance, targeting key sectors such as governance, water supply and sanitation, food security and income generation for rural communities, health and education. Australia is also providing A$ 1 million to the World Food Programme (WFP) appeal for emergency food aid assistance. We commend the re-establishment of the World Food Programme in Timor-Leste as an important step in the ongoing monitoring of food security and enhanced capacity-building for Timor-Leste. We encourage further long-term involvement with the broader donor community in the WFP's endeavours.

Australia has committed more than A$ 100 million to the humanitarian and reconstruction needs of the Iraqi people. Australia provided prompt assistance to key international humanitarian agencies in their preparations and early support to the United Nations Flash Appeal and associated agencies, including a commitment of A$ 6 million to the Central Emergency Revolving Fund, provision of water supply and sanitation services, disease prevention and treatment programmes, food distribution, provision of child protection services, and the clearance of mines and unexploded ordnance.

Although Australia's aid programme is focused primarily on our region — the Asia Pacific — we remain committed to helping to meet humanitarian needs across the globe. As part of its global commitment, Australia continues to support the needs of Palestinian communities affected by the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, providing almost A$ 3.5 million in humanitarian assistance through United Nations agencies in 2002-2003. Such assistance includes contributions to food aid, food security and psychosocial programmes, and has been delivered primarily through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the World Food Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Finally, let me record Australia's appreciation for the efforts of the former Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Kenzo Oshima. We were pleased to host Mr. Oshima in Australia last year for the launch of the 2003 United Nations Inter-Agency Consolidated Appeals. We look forward to working with his successor, Mr. Jan Egeland. Australia will continue to engage strongly with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and other effective agencies in order to improve the impact and quality of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance.

Mr. Radhakrishnam (India): We thank the Secretary- General for the reports which have been prepared on "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance". We associate ourselves with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 on this agenda item.

Recent events have clearly demonstrated the fact that the United Nations cannot fulfil the role expected

of it in the field of humanitarian assistance if the safety and security of its personnel is not ensured. Sergio Vieira de Mello and his colleagues, who laid down their lives in the terrorist attacks against United Nations headquarters in Baghdad on 19 August, served in the finest tradition of the international civil service as represented by the United Nations. The deliberate targeting of United Nations personnel involved in the pursuit of peace makes this incident all the more tragic.

The report before us (A/58/89) has enhanced our understanding of key issues which merit consideration by the General Assembly, particularly those relating to humanitarian financing and the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance. The report points out that there has been a doubling of overall levels of humanitarian aid since 1990. This is, indeed, most heartening. It is, however, a matter of concern that this increase in humanitarian assistance has been accompanied by an overall decline in flows of official development assistance.

The Secretary-General has, in another report, referred to humanitarian assistance's crowding out the resources required for development. The Economic and Social Council this year reiterated that humanitarian assistance should be provided in a way that is not to the detriment of resources made available for development cooperation. It is important to ensure this, as it is development assistance which, in the long term, reduces the need for emergency humanitarian assistance.

The Secretary-General's report draws attention to the fact that donor decisions to allocate resources are not driven primarily by objective needs but more by domestic considerations, traditional patterns of expenditure and geopolitical interests. The largest shortfalls in responses to the consolidated appeals process, reaching more than 70 per cent, are faced by the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. That pattern goes against the basic tenets of humanitarian assistance as contained in General Assembly resolution 46/182.

The Economic and Social Council has, in response to that trend, encouraged the donor community to provide humanitarian assistance in proportion to needs and on the basis of need assessments, with a view to ensuring a more equitable distribution of assistance across humanitarian emergencies, including those of a protracted nature. We hope that the Council's call will be heeded.

The report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/58/434, which focuses on natural disasters, has attempted, for the first time, also to provide information on funding trends for natural-disaster responses. We commend the Secretariat for its efforts, even though the information provided is somewhat sketchy. We understand that this is because of definitional problems and a lack of consistency with regard to the bases on which information is compiled. This issue needs to be addressed, as the absence of comprehensive and precise information affects our understanding of an issue to which the international community attaches great importance.

We understand that the Secretariat has set up a joint working group to review a range of United Nations responses in post-conflict transition situations. Our attention has been drawn to the recommendations of that group, which are contained in the Secretary-General's report on the reform of the Organization. We note that the working group attached importance to the facilitation of links among the political, peacekeeping and operational wings of the United Nations and to addressing the variance in mandates for different United Nations offices at a given location.

That recommendation seems to be based on the premise that the response of the United Nations cannot be effective if it is fragmented and that, therefore, the various entities dealing with human rights, security, humanitarian assistance and development should deliver an integrated response. The recommendations of the working group also call for strengthening the efforts of the United Nations in the areas of advocacy and negotiation.

We have always highlighted the risks associated with such an approach. Life-saving humanitarian assistance must be provided on the basis of the principles of neutrality, humanity and impartiality. Such assistance should never be used as a bargaining tool by those dealing with political issues, though the promotion and protection of human rights is undoubtedly important. However, if humanitarian workers were to do so, they would be politicizing their actions and compromising their access to those in need. Similarly, development assistance provided by the United Nations needs to respect the principles of neutrality and country-driven programming. In the post-conflict scenario, affected Governments may not be best placed to assert their own priorities. The United Nations, therefore, needs to provide assistance for

capacity-building; it should not attempt to take advantage of the situation through bypassing the national Government.

The mandates of peacekeeping operations also need to be defined in a manner that does not result in their being seen as partial. The last regular session of the Economic and Social Council has provided legislative guidance in this regard through its resolution which, inter alia, affirms the leading role of civilian organizations in implementing humanitarian assistance. It also affirms the need, in situations where military capacity and assets have to be used to support the implementation of humanitarian assistance, to ensure that such use is strictly in conformity with humanitarian principles.

We note that transition situations particularly attract the attention of both the Secretariat and the donor countries. To be concerned about bridging the gap between relief and development and to provide emergency assistance in ways that are supportive of recovery and long-term development is laudable. The tendency to see transition situations as opportunities to fundamentally transform social mores, recast economic priorities and influence political dynamics is, however, most regrettable. If it collaborates with such efforts, the United Nations will run the risk of jeopardizing its status as a trusted partner of the developing countries.

The arguments which we have outlined for clearly respecting the differences in the United Nations roles in peacekeeping, the protection and promotion of human rights, the fostering of economic and social development and the coordination of humanitarian assistance also provide a reason for approaching with caution and circumspection any integrated plan for the fulfilment of these objectives, for example, through a form of economic and social security council.

The General Assembly has outlined the Guiding Principles of humanitarian assistance in the annex of its resolution 46/182, adopted in 1991. While coordinated and intrusive approaches may seem more attractive, the efforts of the Secretariat in the field of humanitarian assistance will be assessed by us in terms of the benchmarks provided by this resolution.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.

United Nations A/58/PV.38

General Assembly

Official Records

Fifty-eighth session

38th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 21 October 2003, 10 a.m.
New York

President: The Hon. Julian R. Hunte ..... (Saint Lucia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Alsaidi (Yemen), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 40 (*continued*)

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

Report of the Secretary-General (A/58/344)

(a) Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/58/89, A/58/434)

(b) Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/58/133, A/58/224, A/58/225, A/58/273, A/58/280, A/58/285, A/58/286, A/58/358)

(c) Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster

Report of the Secretary-General (A/58/332)

(d) Participation of volunteers, "White Helmets", in the activities of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and technical cooperation for development

Report of the Secretary-General (A/58/320)

(e) Assistance to the Palestinian people

Report of the Secretary-General (A/58/88 and A/58/88/Corr.1)

Mr. Al-Shamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the United Arab Emirates, I thank Mr. Hunte for his efforts in directing the deliberations of this session. I also thank the Secretary-General for his valuable and comprehensive reports on this item, which will help towards the success of our deliberations. We also wish to associate ourselves with the statement made by Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The United Arab Emirates has been following closely the relentless efforts of the United Nations to provide humanitarian relief assistance to countries affected by armed conflicts and natural disasters. According to reports of the Secretary-General, the number of individuals in need of emergency and relief development assistance has increased over the past year, due to the outbreak of wars and conflicts in previously untroubled regions, such as in parts of Africa and in Iraq, as well as the continued violence in the occupied Palestinian territories and the severe

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decline in economic and humanitarian conditions in many developing countries, especially the African Horn, which has been affected by drought and the spread of HIV/AIDS. All of this requires a doubling of the United Nations humanitarian assistance to help those countries cope with disasters and tragic human conditions.

In this regard, we express our deep sorrow over the deaths by terrorism and violence of United Nations employees as they carried out their noble missions in such countries as Iraq and other areas affected by armed conflicts. We are also concerned about the obstacles and dangers that impede access to affected areas and people in need of help, as in the occupied Palestinian territories. In that respect, we support the measures taken by the United Nations to enhance awareness of the importance of safeguarding the security of its employees while they do their noble humanitarian work.

We also commend efforts by specialized agencies of the United Nations to coordinate humanitarian relief operations and stress the need to double international efforts to strengthen emergency and development assistance to developing and poor countries, which are the most grievously affected by disasters and armed conflicts because of the vulnerability of their economic and ecological systems. We also call on the donor countries to fulfil their commitments to helping the affected countries and to coordinate and strengthen their assistance in the context of a development strategy that aims at building systems capable of coping with natural disasters more efficiently. We also urge the international community to strengthen international humanitarian law and human rights conventions in order to eliminate the root causes of armed conflicts and wars, which have disastrous repercussions and impede development.

Given its sense of responsibility for and sympathy towards the international community, the United Arab Emirates has always met its financial obligations to the United Nations and the peacekeeping budget. It also donates annually to United Nations bodies and agencies involved in humanitarian and development activities. Under the leadership of Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, President of the country, the Government of the United Arab Emirates attaches great importance to providing emergency relief and long-term development assistance, through a number of specialized national institutions, to developing and poor countries and those affected by natural disasters and conflict. It is estimated that the country spends 3.5 per cent of its annual gross national product on foreign aid, which includes emergency relief and development assistance, donations and loans to 50 countries in Africa, Asia and Europe. Coordinated airborne relief assistance, land caravans and mobile field hospitals, such as those sponsored by the State and by the Red Crescent of the United Arab Emirates, have helped to deliver timely emergency assistance to areas in conflict, such as Iraq, Palestine, Kosovo and Afghanistan, as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkey, Lebanon, Sudan and Somalia.

In an initiative of the President of the State, the United Arab Emirates allocated $50 million to dismantle 130,000 landmines in South Lebanon in 2001. As of October 2002, the unit had succeeded in removing and defusing 17,793 landmines.

The United Arab Emirates recognizes the need of affected countries to rehabilitate and reconstruct after containing the consequences of disasters. Accordingly, the United Arab Emirates has always extended soft loans and donations to developing and affected countries to build dams, power stations, roads, ports and fully equipped residential units. It has also donated $30 million to the reconstruction of Afghanistan, in addition to in-kind assistance to support the country's economic and political stability. The United Arab Emirates continues to extend financial and material assistance to help the Palestinian people rebuild their cities and villages and provides them with jobs. The United Arab Emirates plays an essential role in the process of reconstructing Iraq. It is part of the core group of donor countries to participate in the conference of donor countries for the reconstruction of Iraq, to be held on 23 and 24 of this month in Madrid.

The United Arab Emirates is deeply concerned about the dire and deteriorating humanitarian conditions of the Palestinian people, which are caused by the Israeli policy of killing, destroying and blockading cities, and obstructing humanitarian assistance to the people in the occupied Palestinian territories. We call on the international community to compel Israel immediately to stop the killing and aggression, to end the practice of closure and siege and to remove the separation wall, which will lead to a humanitarian and economic disaster in the West Bank. We also demand that Israel allow international humanitarian organizations to deliver the needed

emergency assistance to the Palestinian people, in accordance with international humanitarian law, especially the Fourth Geneva Convention. We also urge the donor countries and the influential financial institutions to increase the amount and quality of humanitarian assistance delivered to the Palestinian people in order to save them from a tragedy deplored by the human conscience and rejected by international humanitarian law.

Mr. Siv (United States): I thank the Secretary-General for his thorough and wide-ranging report on humanitarian assistance. He has pointed to the alleviation of certain humanitarian crises this year. This includes progress in the return home of refugees and internally displaced persons in places such as Afghanistan, Sierra Leone and Angola. We are heartened by this. In addition, we welcome the improvements cited by the Secretary-General in Angola and Sudan.

The people of Sudan have suffered for 25 years under a deadly combination of drought and civil war. Two years ago, under the leadership of President Bush, the United States initiated a new push for peace and stability in that nation. We utilized humanitarian inroads in places such as the Nuba Mountains to help build a bridge to peace, contributing $163 million to humanitarian assistance for Sudan in 2003. We worked with the warring parties, other Member States and United Nations agencies. Today, this multi-pronged approach is paying off. Today, the people of Sudan can see a glimmer of hope for their future.

More recently, the international community has used many tools to help Liberia's people take back their country. These have included multilateral diplomatic efforts, bilateral political pressure, the deployment of peacekeepers and the delivery of humanitarian aid throughout the process. As a result, there have been many improvements since we met in Geneva this summer. After an initially challenging start, the humanitarian community demonstrated just how much it can achieve when working together. Over the past year, the United States has provided almost $50 million in humanitarian aid to the Liberian people. At the same time, there remain considerable challenges to the provision of humanitarian assistance and protection to all communities affected by conflict or disaster.

The lack of safe access to many of those communities around the globe continues to plague humanitarian agencies and to cost lives, including those of humanitarian workers. The year 2003 will be long and sadly remembered for the unprovoked and cowardly attack in Baghdad, committed against staff members of the United Nations on 19 August. We have all seen the devastating consequences of this tragedy for individual colleagues and for our community of nations. We commend United Nations agencies and their staff for the resilience and dedication they have demonstrated in choosing to persevere in Iraq and in other conflict zones. This bears witness to the strength of the Organization.

The United States holds the improvement of security conditions in Iraq among its highest priorities. Our commitment to the safety and security of humanitarian workers worldwide is evidenced by Security Council resolution 1502 (2003). It was adopted unanimously and after much careful reflection on the responsibilities that lie with each of us.

There are other challenges, including the need to implement the United Nations code of conduct to prevent the exploitation, including sexual exploitation, and abuse of those we aim to assist; the need to uphold humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence while working with the many actors in humanitarian response and recognizing their diverse roles; and the need to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian aid. To accomplish this, we must ensure that our aid is more timely, appropriate and coordinated. We welcome the Secretary-General's report on the agenda for further change and the opportunity to thoroughly examine the role of the Resident Coordinator system in humanitarian response.

We recognize the need to adhere to policies of good donorship and remain committed to basing our funding on the sound assessment and prioritization of needs on the ground. The United States continues to be one of the largest donors to the multilateral system. We encourage all donors to work together in continuing to strengthen the strategic and operational coordination role of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. We have valued Kenzo Oshima as a colleague and welcome Jan Egeland as the new head of that important Office.

Finally, every year there are reports indicating that the impact of natural disasters is being heightened. Every year there are more people living on our planet. Many of those people have no choice but to settle on disaster-prone lands. The responsibility for us, as Governments and as Members of the United Nations, is clear. Each country should assess its own vulnerabilities to hazards and prepare and mitigate to the best of its ability. Where the dangers are greatest, we need to invest in mitigation measures to lessen the impact of natural hazards, to install early warning systems and to insist on enforcement of appropriate building codes. At the international level, we must all work with the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. With adequate preparation and cooperation, nations can reduce risks, thereby saving lives.

The year 2003 has seen improvements in several long-standing humanitarian crises. Together, let us work towards the same and more in 2004.

Mr. Laurin (Canada): The Government of Canada is pleased to have the opportunity to address the General Assembly on the subject of strengthening the coordination of the humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations. Let me begin by expressing Canada's satisfaction at the appointment of the new Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Jan Egeland. Mr. Egeland's experience has well prepared him to lead the United Nations humanitarian system and its partners in responding to the challenges and dilemmas that are inherent in humanitarian work.

Events over the past year have demonstrated that the need for concerted and effective humanitarian action has never been stronger. As Member States, there is much we can do to support Mr. Egeland and the dedicated humanitarian professionals working for United Nations agencies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and non-governmental organizations. Key issues requiring our urgent collective attention include the safety and security of United Nations and associated personnel, respect for international humanitarian law, access to affected populations and the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

The United Nations system has made important progress over the past year in developing measures to improve staff safety and security, including through training and the implementation of the Minimum Operating Security Standards. However, in the wake of the senseless attack on United Nations headquarters in Baghdad on 19 August, it is clear that these efforts must be strengthened. That attack constituted a new low in respect for human life, for the principles of the United Nations Charter and for international humanitarian law. It demonstrated a need not only for improved threat-assessment capacity, but also for a review of current approaches to security management. We encourage the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator, in collaboration with United Nations agencies and other partners, to develop practical approaches for consideration by Member States. Security is an implicit cost of doing business. We support the Secretary-General's appeal to States to contribute to the Trust Fund for Security of Staff Members of the United Nations System and security line items in individual consolidated appeals. We further encourage States to amend their import restrictions as required to allow United Nations operations to fully implement the Minimum Operating Security Standards.

While we focus on operational requirements, States and other actors must also act to address legal gaps. We strongly support the new momentum building behind efforts to broaden the scope of the 1994 United Nations Convention on the Safety and Security of United Nations and Associated Personnel. Canada also urges those States that have not yet ratified the 1994 Convention and implemented it in national legislation to do so without delay. Furthermore, we call on States to ensure that the perpetrators of attacks against United Nations and associated personnel are brought to justice and that they do not find safe haven in any Member State.

The dangers faced by humanitarian workers can be seen as part of a broader trend towards lack of respect for international humanitarian law, including humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality. Where this lack of respect stems from ignorance or misunderstanding, humanitarian organizations have often been successful in negotiating access by communicating the nature of their work. More disturbing are contexts in which armed groups are actively hostile to humanitarian action and in which forced displacement, manipulation of food aid and attacks on civilians are deliberately pursued. It is clear that the international community must continue to struggle to meet such challenges.

We are not without means. Research, advocacy and experience have provided the international community with an impressive range of tools to enhance the protection of civilians. Our most effective response in most circumstances remains promotion and implementation of human rights, international humanitarian law and refugee law. These efforts should be undertaken in tandem with support to the practical steps humanitarian agencies can take to enhance protection at the field level. Where these agencies prove unable to overcome determined opposition, we have recourse to traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms, including good offices, capacity-building, preventive military deployments and peacekeeping or peace enforcement missions.

Canada is pleased that the Security Council continues to promote the protection of civilians in armed conflict agenda, as was seen in the robust mandates conferred on the peace support missions sent to Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Regional organizations have considerable potential to further that agenda, as shown by the emphasis on protection of civilians in the mandate conferred upon the Economic Community of West African States by the Security Council in Côte d'Ivoire. On a similar note, we should not ignore the capacity of individual States to influence other States or armed groups to modify their behaviour.

(*spoke in French*)

Despite setbacks, coordination of humanitarian action continues to improve both at headquarters and in the field. Canada is pleased by the efforts of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), in collaboration with its partners, in particular the work to further improve the Consolidated Appeals Process. We applaud the contingency planning for Iraq. We welcome the work of the OCHA Internal Displacement Unit and the collaborative approach it has promoted to meeting the protection and assistance needs of internally displaced persons. Canada remains convinced that this approach represents the most effective strategy and urges all agencies to support its work in this regard.

We believe that OCHA's collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme and the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, in partnership with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, has led to more effective strategies for disaster preparedness, mitigation and response. Likewise, OCHA's advice on civilian-military issues this past year has benefited both humanitarian organizations and States. Canada welcomes the development of the Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets to Support United Nations Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies. The Guidelines provide a useful framework by clarifying ways in which military forces can be directed in support of humanitarian activities without undermining respect for humanitarian principles. Canada commends OCHA and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) for their work on these Guidelines and encourages them to continue to promote their use.

With respect to the IASC, we believe that its work continues to demonstrate its value as a forum for humanitarian agencies to develop responses to global challenges. Canada welcomes the work of the IASC in improving coordinated and effective responses to HIV/AIDS. On the issue of sexual and gender-based violence, the IASC has shown commendable leadership. The 2002 Plan of Action outlining minimum standards of behaviour, now complemented by the bulletin of the Secretary-General, should serve as a guide for all United Nations agencies and States in the prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence. Action must be devoted to follow-up on this work, including by ensuring the six core principles are integrated into programme design, execution, monitoring and evaluation.

Other noteworthy inter-agency work is being undertaken by the joint Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs/United Nations Development Group Working Group on Transition Issues. Canada hopes that the Working Group's recommendations will lead to improvements in how the United Nations system responds to countries emerging from conflict.

While considerable progress is being made, inter-agency rivalry and competition for finite resources persist. Further efforts are required to enhance coordination and coherence among humanitarian actors. In addition to supporting the work of OCHA and the IASC, there are many ways in which States can assist these efforts. This past year has seen considerable attention devoted to means by which needs-based approaches to humanitarian action can be improved, including through the Consolidated Appeals Process. Both the Humanitarian Financing Work

Programme and the International Meeting on Good Humanitarian Donorship have helped identify ways to address weaknesses of the current humanitarian system. These include capacity-building of affected States, broader beneficiary participation, greater accountability of donors and affected States and harmonization of reporting requirements. We will work within our own bureaucracy, and collectively with other donor Governments, towards the implementation of the principles and good practices that were agreed at Stockholm.

In conclusion, despite the considerable challenges which continue to confront us, we are moving in the right direction. Roles and responsibilities of affected States, donors, the different parts of the United Nations system and partners in humanitarian action are becoming clearer. This clarity lends itself not only to mutual accountability, but also and above all to accountability to those we are trying to assist. They are counting on our commitment. It is incumbent upon us to respond.

Mr. Aguilar Zinser (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): The report of the Secretary-General on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations cautions that, over the past 30 years, the natural disasters that afflict the world have tripled in frequency and that there has also been an increase in the number of people affected by them. It also notes, however, that the number of deaths from natural disasters has declined as a result of actions to prevent potential catastrophes and of investments made in preventive mechanisms.

These are important figures. They show that work undertaken at the national and international levels to prevent natural disasters can indeed contribute to reducing the negative impact of such disasters. That is why Mexico believes it essential that we continue to strengthen the international community's mechanisms of cooperation in order to prevent and cope with natural disasters. It is necessary to enhance national, regional and United Nations system capacities and to strengthen the role of our Organization as the coordinator of the international community's efforts on behalf of the countries affected, in accordance with the priorities established by the authorities of those States themselves.

In Mexico and in Central America, cooperation has yielded positive results in the field of prevention and in disaster relief assistance. International cooperation in disaster relief, as we see it, should be integrated into a long-term context and a thorough consideration of the conditions of vulnerability that, in many instances, explain the magnitude of the damage caused by such disasters.

We must therefore view the problem from the perspective of sustainable development, which is indeed the best defence against the ravages of nature and other disasters because it gives societies, through the actions of their States, the tools they need to increase their capacity to respond, to coordinate activities and to make good use of resources, thus reducing the vulnerability of communities to disasters.

In addition to efforts to reduce the vulnerability of peoples to natural disasters, it is necessary to eradicate poverty. There is a direct link between vulnerability to natural disasters and socio-economic conditions. It is a fact that poor communities usually find themselves in situations of far greater risk and vulnerability. In his report on the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, the Secretary-General indicates that many countries are rapidly accumulating latent risks arising out of growing population densities in dangerous areas, the elimination of environmental protection capacities that contribute to mitigating dangers, and the emergence of new social and economic vulnerabilities due to immigration, urban development and unequal economic growth.

In this regard, it is also important to stress the direct causal relationship between the vulnerability of communities to natural disasters and the destruction of the environment that occurs around such communities. Deforestation is among the most serious causes of vulnerability to natural disasters in our countries. Hence the importance of integrating international cooperation in disaster and vulnerability reduction into an comprehensive approach to reducing poverty and to protecting and preserving the environment.

With respect to man-made disasters, it is important to emphasize that various United Nations bodies — in particular the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council — are considering the question of the protection of civilians in armed conflict and of humanitarian personnel. The Security Council, however, has a special responsibility in this regard. As has been pointed out here, it has become increasingly clear and explicit that the Security Council is interested

in including in its mandates mechanisms for the protection of civilians in conflict situations. We have seen this in the Council's actions on the principal conflicts now on its agenda.

Nevertheless, in connection with the protection of humanitarian personnel of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations, the Security Council has been slow to act. It was not until the recent adoption of resolution 1502 (2003), which was promoted by Mexico, that the Council specifically addressed the safety and protection of humanitarian personnel in situations of armed conflicts. The terrible events of 19 August in Baghdad highlighted the urgent need for the Council to be endowed with appropriate instruments to ensure the security and protection of personnel doing humanitarian work. Such instruments could be made available both to the relevant humanitarian organizations and to the United Nations so that countries and parties to a conflict might understand their responsibilities with regard to the protection of humanitarian personnel.

Resolution 1502 (2003) condemns all acts of violence committed against humanitarian personnel, and deliberate attacks in particular. It reaffirms the obligation of all parties involved in an armed conflict to comply fully with the rules and principles of international law related to the protection of such personnel. It recalls the need for States to end impunity for those who perpetrate such acts. As a result of the adoption of the resolution, the Secretary-General must now address, in all his country-specific situation reports, the issue of the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and United Nations and its associated personnel, including specific acts of violence against such personnel, remedial actions taken to prevent similar incidents and actions taken to identify and hold accountable those who commit such acts. Moreover, he is requested to explore and propose additional ways and means to enhance the safety and security of personnel of the United Nations and humanitarian organizations, who provide vital assistance in conflict situations.

The situation of personnel providing such assistance has deteriorated in recent years. A source of particular concern is the increase in deliberate attacks and the fact that they impact directly on the neutrality and impartiality inherent in humanitarian work. Deliberate attacks on humanitarian personnel are classified as war crimes in the Statute of the International Criminal Court and in resolution 1502 (2003) itself. Such a definition seeks to make it extremely clear that humanitarian personnel are playing a central role in protecting and assisting civilian populations affected by armed conflict.

That is why ensuring the security of personnel in charge of humanitarian assistance is an obligation of the warring parties and should be a fundamental task of States, the United Nations and humanitarian organizations. The United Nations must continue to strengthen its coordination with the agencies and other governmental and non-governmental organizations on the ground.

Mr. Oyugi (Kenya): I take this opportunity to commend Mr. Hunte on the able manner in which he continues to guide our work. Let me reassure him of my delegation's support and cooperation.

We wish to thank the Secretary-General for his report, contained in document A/58/344, submitted under the agenda item on strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, which is the subject of our deliberations.

My delegation notes with grave concern the tragic loss of life of humanitarian staff in their service to the international community. It is our view that humanitarian staff should be allowed to operate in safe and secure environments. That is one of the operational prerequisites for the successful delivery of humanitarian assistance. In this regard, therefore, we support the Secretary-General's suggestion that it is crucial for Governments and non-State actors to provide stronger commitments to the humanitarian community to ensure that those responsible for attacks on humanitarian staff are promptly brought to book.

The subject before us is a cross-cutting issue that touches many of us in this Assembly. Looking at the Secretary-General's report, we note that developments in the humanitarian environment during the past year have been mixed in that some long-standing conflicts are moving towards a resolution, while, in other parts of the world, there is an unfortunate re-emergence of other conflicts. Protracted conflicts therefore continue to worsen the suffering of civilians in general and of women and children in particular. Furthermore, other challenges have emerged that have aggravated human suffering. These include the ravages of drought and food shortages. The spread of HIV/AIDS in situations

of armed conflict is a development that is challenging humanitarian aid and requires the international community to rethink its approach to emergencies.

The Secretary-General requires the support of all of us in his efforts to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian assistance. Kenya has played a leading role in coordinating the delivery of humanitarian assistance in conflict areas in our region. We have extended assistance, notably to southern Sudan, Somalia, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to name just a few. My delegation concurs with the Secretary-General's observation that

> "in the area of natural disasters, improvements in operational tools need to be reinforced by greater cooperation between the international community and regional and national response actors so as to ensure better synergies in disaster management". (*A/58/89, para. 3*)

Kenya supports the efforts of the United Nations to assist Member States and regional arrangements in responding to natural disasters. Due to the many disasters that have visited our country, mechanisms have been put in place in order for us to be able to respond appropriately. An example of this is the Disaster Preparedness Centre, which is part of the Office of the President, for the purpose of facilitating coordination. The Centre is charged, amongst other things, with the responsibility of capacity-building, the development of early warning systems, the monitoring of natural disasters and overall natural disaster preparedness.

Kenya organized the first regional meeting for disaster management in 2000. The meeting brought together civilian and military leaders from 11 countries. It was organized in conjunction with the Government of the United States and it has since become an annual event known as "The Golden Spear". This event is organized in recognition of the realization that civilian defence assets could be effectively and quickly deployed in the event of a disaster.

We support the relevant resolutions and call on the international community to provide assistance in response to the United Nations 2003 Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal for the relief and rehabilitation of affected countries. We commend the efforts made so far by the international community to mitigate these disasters. In Africa, these efforts have been manifested in various schemes, such as the economic assistance for the reconstruction of Djibouti and the special assistance for the economic recovery and reconstruction of the Congo. There is also the case of the emerging humanitarian assistance for the situation in Ethiopia and the rehabilitation of Somalia.

On the issue of gender mainstreaming, my delegation supports the call for integrating a gender perspective into the full range of emergency operations. The effective targeting of emergency humanitarian assistance to women and girls in refugee camps is critical. This, in our view, should be started from the initial stages of a conflict and continue right through to the post-conflict reconstruction process.

Kenya notes with concern the problem of sexual exploitation and abuse arising in complex emergencies and armed conflict. We support the Plan of Action prepared by the Task Force on the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises. It is expected that all United Nations civilian staff members will subscribe to the six core principles representing the minimum standards of behaviour on their tours of duty. At the same time, it is hoped that the United Nations will enforce the disciplinary procedures that are currently being formulated.

In conclusion, I would like to say that my delegation supports the recommendations outlined in the report of the Secretary-General and will continue to play its part in this regard. However, it is our ardent belief that, if humanitarian assistance is to be of use, it has to be timely, adequate and supported by predictable and sustainable resources. More often than not, humanitarian assistance has been slow, inadequate and unpredictable, thus negating its effectiveness for recipients.

Mr. Fuks (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour of addressing this General Assembly on behalf of my Government on the occasion of our consideration of agenda item 40. In this respect, my delegation wishes to thank the Secretary-General for his report in document A/58/320 on the "White Helmets" initiative, which has been so favourably received by this Assembly.

I wish also to express my sincere recognition of the continuous support given to the initiative by the United Nations Volunteers and other system agencies in the countries in which we have worked together.

I should also like to point out the sustained trust and support the initiative has enjoyed from the United Nations Development Programme in its undertakings. I trust that the actions carried out by the initiative will contribute to extending the cooperation between our countries to our peoples and our Governments. I also wish to mention the close cooperation provided by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in New York and Geneva.

As pointed out by the Secretary-General in his report, White Helmets has proven in its activities and results to be a valuable tool in the areas of cooperation, financing and mobilization of resources. I wish to express my gratitude for the report, which clearly shows the initiative's good intentions and its ongoing progress. This experience is also built on an ever-broadening network of agreements and institutional contacts with, among others, the World Food Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Organization of American States, the Inter-American Development Bank, the United Nations Children's Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the European Parliament and the African Union.

I wish to express my gratitude for the views set forth by the Secretary-General in his report, which confirm the conceptual validity of the previously identified, trained and standby White Helmets volunteers as a useful mechanism available to the United Nations to provide immediate support for its relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development activities. It is within that context that my Government will introduce a draft resolution on the White Helmets initiative for the consideration of the General Assembly.

This is an excellent opportunity for my Government to ratify its commitment to peace and the fight against hunger and extreme poverty, one of the Millennium Development Goals. It is also a propitious occasion to express the conviction that the White Helmets initiative deserves to continue receiving the sustained support of the members of the international community. As the Secretary-General has pointed out on more than one occasion, civil society's active participation in the United Nations activities is indispensable to the success of humanitarian disaster and conflict relief missions. In some circumstances, this participation not only mitigates damages, but can help avoid unwanted situations.

The availability of White Helmet Volunteers is a useful, effective and efficient mechanism for participating in such activity in an orderly and ever-growing way. It is one of many convergent lines of action carried out by different countries. In view of this, we come once again from the South of the world to this General Assembly in the firm conviction that the revitalization of this forum of global representation is essential to consolidating international law and human rights as the rational instruments with which conflicts can be solved and threats faced effectively.

A few weeks ago, before this General Assembly, our country stood firmly by its commitment in the face of the greatest challenge of our time — avoiding a

> "widening of the gap between the rich and poor [reflecting] a grim reality of unprecedented poverty and social exclusion". (*A/58/PV.11, p. 7*)

The Argentine commitment to making globalization work towards the well-being of all was also made clear.

The White Helmets initiative is a mechanism towards attaining that goal. It encompasses all men and women of goodwill in the world, every person with a social conscience. In stressing that

> "new challenges call for different and creative solutions so as not to be left behind by changes in the world in the technological, economical, social and undoubtedly even cultural fields", (*ibid., p. 9*)

the decision to support every effort to attain those goals was stated before every country in this universal forum. Those are the central tasks on the international agenda. We accept the challenge of finding new ideas for a new world, combining different ideas and creating the practical means to put them at the disposal of the nations we represent. That is our duty and our challenge.

In that context, maintaining an international cooperation mechanism is no longer merely about relations among countries with different development conditions. It is no longer enough merely to demonstrate the high level of professionalism of our rapid response teams. The time has come to reaffirm our vocation for solidarity and giving. That is especially true for those of us who have received the support of various actors in the midst of our recent

crises. We have the obligation and the resolve to cooperate with the rest of our fellow countries. With the concurrence of the international community, we are willing to make an effort in the maintenance of that tool for horizontal cooperation.

As many Latin American leaders have stated before this very forum, the different rules that guide world affairs are changing and there is a sense of shared responsibility in the face of the difficult conditions most peripheral countries are experiencing. It is important that the international community continue to debate the nature of its role in these circumstances and the profile of the volunteers who participate in international efforts to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger and to carry out humanitarian activities in natural or man-made emergencies.

White Helmets seeks to make a contribution to that exchange, to collaborate in the construction of adequate models that will help attain the Millennium Development Goals set by the United Nations, and to support activities that mitigate damage caused by tragedies and disasters.

When faced with a crisis, people generate solidary and participative response experiences in the productive, health and social fields. Volunteerism can integrate the protagonists of these everyday epics so as to benefit from their experiences and develop new models for cooperation. This new and not yet fully explored network must, like other initiatives, incorporate representatives who have experienced and faced these crises, misery, poverty and natural disasters. It includes training that will allow the formalization of responses and thus enable the transmission of tools that have emerged from the heart of a crisis to similar populations. It seeks to build working teams that will go to work wherever they are needed. It also contemplates sowing the seeds of a model implementation and organization to be replicated by the men and women of the country that has made the request. I reiterate that we accept the challenge of finding new ideas for a new world, combining different ideas and creating the practical means to put them at the disposal of the nations we represent. That is our duty.

Lastly, I wish to convey once again my Government's deepest thanks to Mr. Hunte for the support this Assembly has given the White Helmets initiative and to all those who, in one way or another, contribute to alleviating world hunger, an objective that binds all men of goodwill.

Mr. Haraguchi (Japan): Let me first express my deep respect for all United Nations personnel devoted to humanitarian assistance activities. They are making an admirable contribution to the effort to help people in need, even at the risk of losing their lives. Despite their sincere efforts, however, there are often cases where humanitarian assistance does not fully produce the expected results due to a lack of coordination among donors and United Nations agencies tackling the same crisis from different angles.

We are of the view that close coordination among donors and various humanitarian agencies and a seamless transition from humanitarian assistance to reconstruction are crucial to achieving effective and mutually reinforcing results, given the limited resources available. Japan once again calls on all donors and humanitarian agencies to work closely together, with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) playing a central role in coordinating them.

In this connection, the Japanese Government welcomes the report of the Commission on Human Security submitted to the Secretary-General last May, which very ably addresses the important issue of the need for United Nations agencies to deal with a crisis in a comprehensive and integrated manner among other subjects. Our delegation took the liberty of sending a copy of the report to all the missions in New York and it is our hope that the representatives here will have a chance to read it. The report says that

> "assistance is often compartmentalized for different categories of people — refugees, returnees, internally displaced persons, demobilized combatants — reflecting the mandates of agencies providing assistance, not overall needs".

The areas of assistance are also divided by the mandates of agencies into food, education, medical care and housing, just to mention a few.

In reality, however, all forms of activity aimed at helping people in need affect each other. In order to address the real needs of suffering people in an effective manner, United Nations agencies need to engage in their dedicated work in a more integrated and comprehensive manner.

It is also important to ensure a seamless transition from humanitarian assistance to reconstruction. Madam Sadako Ogata, former United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Co-chair of the Commission on Human Security, has challenged the notion of "post-conflict" and urged us to rethink the current working arrangements, which have been formulated in accordance with a rather artificial and often misleading demarcation between activities for conflict situations and those to be implemented in post-conflict situations.

Although the focus of activities may shift in time, humanitarian and development assistance needs to be implemented throughout the spectrum of the conflict and post-conflict stages of any humanitarian crisis. With a focus on assisting people rather than adhering to institutional mandates, we will be able to produce results that address the problems people face in their entirety and in the most effective manner.

Based on this idea, the Japanese Government has launched an innovative initiative to provide comprehensive regional development assistance to Afghanistan, under the name the "Ogata Initiative". This initiative aims at arranging and implementing specific, feasible projects emphasizing regional recovery and community empowerment in close cooperation with agencies including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Children's Fund, and the World Food Programme, under the ownership of the Afghan people. The projects cover a broad range of areas such as temporary housing and water-supply systems for the resettlement of refugees and internally displaced persons, and income-generation and food-for-work programmes for comprehensive regional development. Through the experience we obtain from this initiative, I hope that we will be able to further develop a methodology for applying the conceptual framework of human security to concrete projects on the ground that reflect recipients' interests.

It is also true that, no matter how efficiently the relevant United Nations agencies coordinate among themselves, humanitarian assistance activities cannot be carried out fully without adequate financial resources. Here lies the reason why efforts to ensure public understanding are important. Deeper and broader understanding and support for humanitarian needs among the public will make it easier for countries to make contributions to humanitarian crises. To this end, it is essential that United Nations agencies take special care to inform the general public of the tangible and positive results which their activities are expected to produce in the lives of people suffering through humanitarian crises.

In order to realize broader support for humanitarian activities that reflect the diversity of the international community, it is also important to try to increase the number of new donors, as well as to enhance the geographical balance with respect to humanitarian personnel employed by United Nations organizations. At the same time, it is important not to forget the price of our failure to act on what are sometimes called "forgotten crises". When CNN broadcasts news about a new crisis that includes shocking footage of people in distress, it immediately attracts world attention.

On the other hand, even if a humanitarian tragedy continues for a long time, very few will know or be concerned about it unless there is media coverage. Japan hopes that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other agencies further improve the way, for example, through the Consolidated Appeal Process, to address forgotten crises more effectively. For its part, Japan continues to extend humanitarian assistance to regions less in the public eye, such as Southern Africa, either through United Nations agencies or bilaterally.

In the wake of the violent attack on the United Nations offices in Baghdad, the issue of the security of humanitarian personnel has come to the forefront of international concern. Humanitarian personnel are often dispatched to dangerous front lines even at very early stages of a conflict in a spirit of humanity, neutrality, and impartiality. These are the people who are most deeply committed to the noble cause of helping others who are helpless and suffering, and no attack on these people, whatever the reason, should ever be tolerated. We have to bear in mind that no effective humanitarian assistance is possible without their presence on the ground.

It is indispensable to ensure the safety of personnel engaging in United Nations humanitarian operations. Japan welcomes Security Council resolution 1502 (2003) as an important step towards better protection of humanitarian personnel. It is necessary to conduct further discussions on this matter, including the question of expanding the scope of

protection under the existing Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel.

Lastly, let me touch briefly upon the importance of disaster reduction. In addition to man-made conflict, natural disasters often cause grave humanitarian crises. Consequently, a significant portion of humanitarian assistance activities have as their goal the provision of relief to victims of natural disasters. But relief is only part of the answer. A wider range of measures is required to this end, including those aimed at reducing natural disasters, namely, mitigation, prevention and preparedness.

I have to stress that disaster reduction is also essential to the achievement of the overarching objectives of sustainable development. It is highly important as well in terms of carrying out the World Summit on Sustainable Development Plan of Implementation, as well as following up the Ministerial Conference of the Third World Water Forum.

Japan has proposed that the General Assembly adopt a resolution enabling the United Nations to hold a world conference on disaster reduction in order to conclude the review of the 1994 Yokohama Strategy, adopted at the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction, and upgrade it to more fully reflect the guiding principles of the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and to identify specific policy measures to put the Yokohama Strategy into effect. I would like to appeal to Member States to support this resolution. If it is accepted, Japan would like to host the conference in Kobe, in Hyogo Prefecture, in January 2005, in close coordination and cooperation with the Inter-Agency Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

Let me conclude my remarks by assuring you that Japan, together with other donor countries, will continue to be an active supporter of OCHA and other United Nations agencies engaged in humanitarian assistance.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I give the floor to Mr. Vladimir Tsalka, Chairman of the Committee on the problems of the consequences of the catastrophe at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant at the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus.

Mr. Tsalka (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): The General Assembly is today considering an issue of extreme importance both for my country and for the entire international community. With the Chernobyl catastrophe, human civilization entered a new stage of development in which technological risk, multiplied by the human factor, is jeopardizing its very existence.

At present, we all face a number of questions. Have we managed to find an adequate response to that challenge? What is the current situation in the most affected regions? What efforts need to be made to improve the situation and to increase the world community's ability to cope with a possible recurrence of large-scale radiation disasters?

Belarus, where nearly 2 million people still reside in contaminated areas, which make up 23 per cent of the country's territory, continues to undertake considerable efforts aimed at minimizing the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe. The resources we must allocate every year to address post-Chernobyl problems are comparable to our education, health care and defence expenditures. Since 1991 we have spent more than $13 billion to mitigate the impact of Chernobyl. The estimated total damage amounts to $235 billion. It is obvious that those additional forced expenditures could be otherwise allocated for the purposes of the country's social and economic development.

Thanks to consistent and efficient measures at the national level, our country has managed to minimize the impact of radiation. The radiological situation in Belarus is stable and is regularly monitored. However, the Chernobyl catastrophe entails a range of complex problems for the health sector and for the ecological management and economic development of the affected regions.

There is some degree of uncertainty with regard to preserving the health of people living in contaminated areas and the steps that should be taken in that regard. There is still no international consensus regarding the long-term impact of low-level doses of radiation on people. That cannot but be a matter of concern.

We highly commend the informative and mobilizing role played by the United Nations in creating momentum to overcome the aftermath of Chernobyl. It is no coincidence that the first resolution of the General Assembly on this issue, resolution 45/190, which established the political and institutional basis to develop full-fledged international cooperation

on Chernobyl-related issues, was called a resolution of humanism, solidarity and charity.

The Secretary-General's report (A/58/332) under consideration comprehensively reflects the measures that have been undertaken by the Governments of affected States in collaboration with the specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system, as well as of the current difficulties in the process of implementing resolution 56/109 on the subject of Chernobyl, which was adopted during the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly.

The three most affected countries — Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine — have initiated an additional draft resolution on Chernobyl for adoption by the General Assembly at the fifty-eighth session. That is a logical and consistent step towards the implementation of the new strategy proposed in the United Nations report entitled "The Human Consequences of the Chernobyl Nuclear Accident: A Strategy for Recovery", envisaging a gradual shift from the provision of humanitarian aid to ensuring the sustainable development of the affected regions.

The implementation of that strategy is based upon a comprehensive approach to addressing post-Chernobyl problems that includes a variety of measures in the areas of health, social and psychological rehabilitation, environmental recovery and economic development. That approach is based on the concept of the active involvement of the affected population in the rehabilitation process.

The Government of Belarus fully supports that strategy and calls for enhanced international cooperation, which is a powerful instrument in alleviating the consequences of the catastrophe. I would like to emphasize that the most important task at the current stage is to translate theoretical recommendations into real projects and collaborative programmes. Such work is already under way in Belarus.

The declaration on the principles of the international Cooperation for Rehabilitation programme was signed at Minsk on 15 October 2003. The United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and a number of European non-governmental organizations are among the international participants in the programme. The European Commission, a number of States members of the European Union and other participants are expected to endorse the declaration in the near future. I would like to take this opportunity to urge all concerned countries and international organizations to take part in the implementation of the programme, which is the first of a new generation of Chernobyl-related initiatives aimed at ensuring sustainable development in the affected regions. I am confident that the United Nations has the necessary knowledge, technology and resources to implement development programmes in Chernobyl-affected regions.

The International Chernobyl Research and Information Network and the International Atomic Energy Agency's Chernobyl Forum, which were established this year, will certainly make a valuable contribution to the development of concrete programmes and projects. We expect that the outcome of their activities will help achieve a significant improvement in the living conditions of the people affected by this most serious radiation disaster.

I would also like to draw attention to the initiative announced recently in this Hall by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus (see A/48/PV.20) to organize an international conference at Minsk in 2006 to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl catastrophe. I am confident that the conference will promote the further enhancement of international cooperation on Chernobyl-related issues on the basis of the principles of solidarity, mutually beneficial cooperation and efficient coordination of bilateral and multilateral initiatives. We would like to invite all those interested to take part in the preparation and work of that international conference.

In conclusion, I would like to invite Member States to support the draft resolution on Chernobyl. It is my hope that its noble principles will serve as a sound basis to strengthen the efforts of the international community to restore decent living conditions for the people affected by the Chernobyl catastrophe.

Mr. Kim San-hoon (Republic of Korea): My delegation applauds the efforts of United Nations programmes, funds and agencies to provide and coordinate humanitarian assistance around the world. We would also like to thank the Secretary-General for

providing us with a comprehensive set of reports on the various issues involved.

The United Nations has unparalleled authority and expertise in bringing life-saving assistance to people in vulnerable situations in the aftermath of disaster, civil strife and conflict. The Republic of Korea actively supports and takes part in those efforts. This year we have provided $33 million in humanitarian assistance through the United Nations, which includes $13 million in assistance for Iraq. We are also doing what we can bilaterally. In particular, this year we have provided humanitarian assistance for North Korea totalling around $230 million, which includes 300,000 tons of fertilizer, 400,000 tons of rice and $50 million of aid from civic groups.

Mr. Bennouna (Morocco), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The Republic of Korea supports the central role played by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the areas of humanitarian advocacy, policy and coordination. We appreciate the consolidated appeal process and other mechanisms established to strengthen international cooperation for improved emergency preparedness and response. We have every confidence that the new Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Jan Egeland, will actively build upon the accomplishments of his predecessor to further strengthen the humanitarian assistance work of the United Nations.

Our deliberations on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance are taking place following a sobering year. While the need for the United Nations to continue in its mission of leading humanitarian assistance around the world has not diminished in the least, the threat to the safety and security of its personnel in the field has been greatly heightened. That message was painfully brought home by the attack on United Nations headquarters in Baghdad on 19 August. That attack was universally condemned, but we must do more than condemn. At the end of the day, the United Nations must emerge with strengthened, rather than weakened, resolve to carry on.

Member States must support the efforts of the United Nations by ensuring that the atrocity of 19 August does not go unpunished. Indeed, impunity for crimes committed against United Nations personnel must be brought to an end all around the world. It is deeply disheartening to learn that although more than 200 civilians have lost their lives to malicious acts while in the service for the United Nations since 1992, in only 21 cases has legal action been taken by the Member States concerned to bring the perpetrators to justice. Efforts must be redoubled to achieve a better record.

While our current focus remains on Iraq and a few other high-profile cases, the reports submitted by the Secretary-General under sub-items (a) to (e) of agenda item 40 remind us that a much larger part of humankind requires continued assistance. Let us not forget the "forgotten emergencies". It is rare that humanitarian assistance can be effective with short-term intervention.

A clear case in point is the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which has reached crisis levels in many developing countries. As was discussed during the high-level dialogue on the issue earlier during this session of the General Assembly, when HIV/AIDS combines with other elements of humanitarian need in many poor countries the result is an escalation of vulnerability. The fight against HIV/AIDS must therefore be integrated into efforts to overcome complex emergencies in those countries.

Furthermore, the Republic of Korea believes that humanitarian assistance should be seen in the long-term perspective of rehabilitation and development. In that regard, we view the transition from relief to development as an important area of work for the United Nations in coordinating humanitarian assistance. We welcome the outcome of the Economic and Social Council's deliberations on that issue. We hope that the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and United Nations Development Group review of the issues involved will generate useful recommendations.

The Republic of Korea also emphasizes the importance of safe and unhampered access by humanitarian personnel to vulnerable populations, as well as of transparency in humanitarian assistance. It goes without saying that assistance must reach the people who need it. But that may not always be the case. We encourage the programmes, funds and agencies of the United Nations to take further steps in that regard, knowing full well that the concrete steps to be taken will vary depending on the circumstances on the ground.

In closing, I would like to reiterate the abiding commitment of the Republic of Korea to supporting, and actively participating in, the humanitarian activities of the United Nations on the basis of the principles of independence, neutrality, impartiality and humanity.

Ms. Enkhtsetseg (Mongolia): The extent and nature of the developments and challenges in the humanitarian field have become increasingly complex over the past few years. Humanitarian emergencies, exacerbated by protracted and emerging conflicts, epidemics like HIV/AIDS and the frequent occurrence of natural disasters in many parts of the world, increasingly require an effective, adequate and timely response. In order to ensure the provision of such a response, we must deliberate on a number of issues raised by the Secretary-General in his reports submitted under the agenda item under consideration. Those issues include, among others, the transition from relief to development, humanitarian financing and the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance, the protection of civilians, emergency preparedness, natural disasters, internally displaced persons and HIV/AIDS in the context of emergencies.

My delegation, while associating itself with the statement made yesterday by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, wishes to make a few additional remarks.

For humanitarian assistance to be adequate it has to be commensurate with the needs of a given emergency, equitably distributed and effectively managed. It seems all three areas are interrelated, and all have room for further improvement. As seen from the reports of the Secretary-General, there is no consistency in the way in which humanitarian needs are currently assessed. Assessments vary to a great degree, not just between countries but also from year to year. In our view, although assessing the adequacy of humanitarian assistance in relation to need is a complex task, a common tool to analyse and diagnose a given situation has to be developed, and it must be consistently applied. That will help to restore the trust of donors in the value of assessments and will contribute towards ensuring a more equitable distribution of humanitarian assistance.

Another area requiring attention is the need to develop definitions that clearly identify eligible flows and provide a qualitative description of humanitarian assistance in order to redress the present disturbing situation when various uses of humanitarian assistance lead to a blurring of the distinction between humanitarian assistance and official development assistance. In that respect, my delegation wishes to emphasize the importance of the call made in the Economic and Social Council this year for humanitarian assistance to be provided in a way that is not to the detriment of resources made available for development cooperation.

My delegation strongly supports further enhancement of the central and unique role of the United Nations in providing leadership for operations and coordination of international humanitarian action. We commend the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for the important role it plays in responding to complex humanitarian crises around the world. My delegation would like to take this opportunity to thank former Under-Secretary-General Kenzo Oshima for his indomitable perseverance and able stewardship, as well as to welcome his successor, Mr. Jan Egeland. We wish him well in undertaking his onerous responsibilities.

The frequency and magnitude of natural disasters have considerably increased over the past three decades, resulting in enormous human and material loss. On the other hand, it is heartening to note that due to the development of better knowledge of hazardous conditions and the investment made in protective measures, a dramatic decline has been registered in the number of deaths from natural disasters in the same period. Nonetheless, capacity-building to enhance preparedness for, and reduce the impact of, natural disasters remains a major challenge, especially in developing countries. It is undisputable that the most effective way to mitigate the consequences of natural disasters is to have adequate capacity at both the national and local levels, including an efficient and credible early warning system, the accurate and speedy assessment of emergencies, with the active involvement of donors, timely advocacy and coherent coordination and greater synergy among all the major actors.

For a country with an extremely low population density, vast territory and weak infrastructure, Mongolia's high susceptibility to natural disasters results in added vulnerability. Mongolia is subject to a number of disasters, including droughts, forest fires, floods, earthquakes and *dzud*, which entails extremely

harsh winters with severe snowstorms. For the past 4 years, Mongolia has been hit hard by successive droughts in summer and *dzud* in winter. The toll on people has been immense, given the devastating economic and social consequences of natural disasters and their impact on a small and vulnerable economy caught in the midst of transition. During the first two winters, my Government, in collaboration with the United Nations, had to raise international support through emergency appeals. My delegation would like to take this opportunity to thank wholeheartedly all our bilateral and multilateral partners for their generous support and assistance to mitigate the consequences of the disaster.

As natural disasters — including *dzud*, droughts and forest fires — are recurring phenomena, my Government, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme and the financial support of donors, has endeavoured to develop a longer-term strategy for disaster preparedness and management to supplement immediate relief measures. The necessary legislative and administrative action has been taken to develop national capacity for disaster preparedness and management, including moving responsibility for disaster management affairs from military to civilian control. We look forward to continued cooperation in strengthening natural disaster preparedness and response capacities at the local, national and regional levels.

Last but not least, my delegation wishes to echo what has been said by many others in underscoring the importance of ensuring the safety and security of humanitarian workers, including United Nations staff. In that connection, I would again like to reiterate that Mongolia, along with other nations, resolutely condemned the barbaric attack on United Nations headquarters in Baghdad last August. United Nations staff are emissaries of peace. In every corner of the world — under the most difficult and, at times dangerous, circumstances — they dedicate their lives to helping people in need. We pay tribute to the late Special Representative Sergio Vieira de Mello, his colleagues and the many others who have dedicated themselves to the ideals of humankind.

Mr. Kazykhanov (Kazakhstan) (*spoke in Russian*): I would first like to thank the Secretary-General for the report (A/58/332) he has submitted under agenda item 41 (c), entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster". That report provides a complete assessment of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 56/109.

Since the adoption of resolution 56/109, the international community and the three States most affected by the Chernobyl disaster have made considerable efforts to overcome the aftermath of that catastrophe. In that regard, we would like to praise the work of the multidisciplinary international inter-agency mission that studied the humanitarian consequences of the accident as part of the fresh assessment of the Chernobyl situation being carried out by the United Nations. The mission's report on that issue, which was launched in New York in February 2002, gave fresh impetus to the work done by the entire international community to implement a range of initiatives in the region in the areas of health, socio-economic development and environmental protection.

Kazakhstan welcomes the concrete steps mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General that have been taken by Member States to enhance cooperation in Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine. We believe that the results that have been achieved in that regard provide a concrete example of joint, goal-oriented work by Governments and the United Nations to implement agreements reached.

The implementation of such projects as the one established with the help of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to set up local social and psychological rehabilitation centres in Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine and the joint programme by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to reduce people's exposure to food-borne radioactivity, as well as programmes aimed, inter alia, at developing agriculture in the affected regions, points to the fact that a serious approach is being taken to finding effective ways to address those problems. Kazakhstan would also like to hail the assistance that has been provided by the donor community for several projects to study, alleviate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe. We believe such assistance to be both extremely timely and essential.

At the same time, we agree with the comments contained both in the report of the Secretary-General and in the annexed reports of the Governments of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine that current aspects of the Chernobyl problem require strengthened international coordination and cooperation to implement the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the various projects and agreements linked to the Chernobyl problem. We also believe that the role of information and dissemination activities must be enhanced in order to draw the international community's attention to events of such devastating scope and consequences as the Chernobyl catastrophe. In that regard, my delegation supports the proposal to declare 26 April the International Day of Remembrance of Victims of Radiation Accidents and Catastrophes. We also support, and will join in sponsoring, the draft resolution on Chernobyl to be introduced at the General Assembly during this session.

The Chernobyl tragedy, which affected three States in particular, is an event that was keenly felt in my country, on whose territory the former Semipalatinsk nuclear testing ground was located — a place where, over more than 40 years, approximately 500 nuclear devices were tested. Those tests caused tremendous harm to the health of the population and environment of Kazakhstan. Statistics indicate that approximately 1.5 million people received very high doses of radiation. The highest level of oncological disease in Kazakhstan affects the inhabitants of the Semipalatinsk region. Since 1950, the infant mortality rate has increased by a factor of 10, and life expectancy has been dropping steadily.

We are grateful to the world community for its support in providing humanitarian and social economic assistance and in helping rehabilitate the environment in the Semipalatinsk region. At the same time, we see that there is an acute need to enhance and increase the international community's efforts to implement the provisions of the relevant resolutions on Semipalatinsk and the recommendations on mobilizing financial resources.

The Chernobyl catastrophe continues to be an extremely serious problem, not only for the countries most seriously affected, but also for the entire world. We are convinced that possible ways of alleviating and minimizing the consequences of this tragedy, as well as the tragedy of the Semipalatinsk region, involve effective implementation of decisions regarding these problems. To give fresh impetus to cooperation in this area, we need to improve coordination and interaction among all parties to the process at the national, regional and global levels.

Mr. Morales (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of Panama is honoured to address this plenary meeting on General Assembly agenda item 40 (b), on behalf of Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama.

Our countries attach special importance to the Alliance for Sustainable Development (ALIDES), as a subregional political framework which, institutionally, represents the commitment of the Central American region to sustainable development.

ALIDES has been an appropriate mechanism for establishing our subregional priorities in the economic, social, political, cultural and environmental areas. Through this initiative, Central America has sought to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and special economic assistance for the subregion.

Through ALIDES, we the Central American nations have focused our efforts on achieving greater and more effective agreement on macroeconomic policies and enhanced modernization of our energy, transportation and telecommunications infrastructures. This Alliance has also been a uniquely important factor in the significant progress we have made towards consolidating peace, based on democratic processes and unswerving respect for human rights, as well as in efforts to achieve the safety and security of our citizens and regional integration.

All that notwithstanding, we have noted with concern the significant reduction in the past two years in non-reimbursable cooperation of donor countries in both regional and national contexts. This has occurred at a time when there has been a considerable decline in investment resources throughout the Central American region.

Despite that, we wish to underscore on this occasion the work being carried under the ALIDES system by the Central American Centre for the Prevention of Natural Disasters (CEPREDENAC). This Centre assists our countries in developing more effective strategies to mitigate the impact of natural disasters. It has made great efforts to establish early

warning networks in the various countries of the region.

The Central American countries are delighted at the decision of the CEPREDENAC Board of Directors to hold the "Mitch Plus 5" regional forum, in conjunction with the Strategic Framework for the Reduction of Vulnerabilities and Disasters in Central America and the Regional Programme for Risk Management in Central America, CEPREDENAC-United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

We are pleased to announce the recent signing in Brussels of a political dialogue and cooperation agreement between the European Union and Central America, which strengthens the process of the San Jose dialogue and also covers economic, immigration and the international fight against terrorism. The outcome of very cordial negotiations, this instrument represents an important step towards strengthening relations between the two regions and towards promoting Central American integration.

We also consider it extremely important to inform Members that, on 12 December 2002, at the European headquarters of the World Bank in Paris, representatives of bilateral and multilateral development agencies renewed their commitment to the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor. Our Biological Corridor, with a surface area similar to that of Great Britain, and representing 20 per cent of the territory of Central America, protects an area that stretches from southern Mexico to Panama. Those protected areas are home to 24,000 species of flora and over 500 species of mammals.

The Central American countries wish to reiterate their hope that the sustained support of the international community and the United Nations system, which are vital to attaining the goals contained in the plan of action of our Alliance for Sustainable Development, will continue to be given in the future, because only by mobilizing adequate resources to support this initiative will we be able to alleviate extreme poverty, conserve the environment and provide benefits of sustainable development of this subregion.

As proof of the commitment not only of our countries, but of the entire region, this year we will submit once again the draft resolution on international assistance and cooperation for the Alliance for the Sustainable Development of Central America. We request the firm support of other Member States for that draft resolution.

Mr. Mekel (Israel): I would like to devote my statement to item 40 (e), entitled "Assistance to the Palestinian people". Unfortunately, the issue addressed by this item was highly misrepresented during this debate.

Israel supports efforts made by the donor and international communities to alleviate the hardships of the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza. Israel is sensitive to the humanitarian and economic needs of the Palestinian people and views the addressing of those needs as a fundamental Israeli interest.

The provision of assistance to the Palestinian people is a primary component of Israeli policy, arising from our belief that stimulating the economic growth of the Palestinian economy and enhancing the welfare of the Palestinian population is integral to the future of our region.

Despite Israel's mounting security concerns, we have endeavoured, to the greatest extent possible, to permit a steady flow of food, medicine, humanitarian assistance and other essential supplies. We have done our utmost to ensure that our legitimate security precautions affect Palestinian life and economic activity as little as possible.

We further welcome the efforts of Member States, as well as those of various international agencies and organizations, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), to improve the living conditions of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Israel is committed to ensuring that those organizations are empowered to fulfil their humanitarian and development mandates, despite the extremely difficult security situation on the ground.

In the debate on this agenda item, the Palestinian Observer referred extensively to the deteriorating economic and humanitarian condition of the Palestinians, blaming Israel's security measures for that situation.

While the increasing hardship faced by the Palestinians is a sad truth, the presentation of Israel's

actions as the cause of this suffering is disingenuous — it is as if one were to begin a story from the middle.

In actuality, the Palestinian plight is due to two factors — the first being the corruption of the Palestinian leadership, and the second being the onslaught of Palestinian terrorism.

I would like first to focus on corruption. One month ago, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) disclosed that its own audit had uncovered the fact that Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat had, between 1995 and 2000, diverted fully $900 million from the budget of the Palestinian Authority into a special bank account under his personal control. According to IMF representative Karim Nashashibi, the money — which came from tax revenues collected by Israel and turned over to Arafat — was used to invest in 69 domestic and foreign commercial companies, whose actual owners were not disclosed. That report of the IMF is hardly surprising. It merely confirms what has long been known about the corrupt nature of Arafat and of the Palestinian leadership.

For example, a European Union audit disclosed that $20 million in Egyptian funds meant to build low-income housing was instead used to build a luxury apartment complex that was given over to top Palestinian Authority officials and Arafat cronies. Last year, Jaweed al-Ghussein, the former Chairman of the Palestinian National Fund, revealed that Arafat had taken more than a half billion dollars in Palestinian public funds and transferred it to his own personal accounts.

Over time, Arafat has accumulated well over $1 billion in personal wealth. With greedy despots such as Yasser Arafat refusing to relinquish the helm, the international community must accept nothing less than total transparency when extending its assistance to the Palestinian people.

This money is not only plundered for personal gain, it is also diverted to finance terrorism — the second and more acute cause of Palestinian hardship.

Following the signing of the 1993 Oslo Accords, Israel made substantial efforts to facilitate Palestinian-Israeli economic cooperation in the context of the peace process. As a result, there had been a marked expansion of Palestinian trade and employment in Israel, as well as other forms of economic cooperation, from 1994 until the outbreak of the present violence.

Israel, in cooperation with the Palestinian Authority, had taken a broad range of actions since 1994 in order to promote and improve the free movement of goods and labour from the Palestinian Authority areas into Israel. In addition, industrial parks have been set up in the Palestinian Authority involving substantial Israeli investment and economic incentives. Those measures have had a significant positive impact on the Palestinian economy.

However, the Palestinian leadership's decision, following the Camp David Summit of July 2000, to employ violence as a political tool sabotaged Israeli-Palestinian economic cooperation and left Israel with no choice but to implement essential security measures in order to defend itself from Palestinian terrorism. The acute security threat presented by Palestinian terrorism makes these measures unavoidable if Israel is to fulfil its duty as a sovereign State to safeguard the lives of its citizens.

It must be stressed that the purpose of the security precautions is not so-called collective punishment. Israel has no desire unduly to burden the Palestinian population, but, rather, to ensure the security of Israeli citizens facing daily threats to their very lives.

The Secretary-General's report (A/58/88) recognizes the terrorist attacks by Palestinians against Israelis as a cause of the present crisis. The challenge Israel faces is to do its utmost to protect its citizens, while doing as much as it can to minimize the impact of tightened security on the Palestinian population, among whom terrorists hide and operate, in violation of international humanitarian law. This is not an easy job, and it involves excruciating dilemmas of balancing conflicting human rights, the most important of which is the right to life itself. Israel has taken calculated risks in order to try to close the gap between security needs on the one hand and humanitarian needs on the other.

Despite the difficult reality presented by the terrorists, who show no respect for life or for law, Israeli policy makes every effort to minimize harm to the civilian population and to differentiate it from the terrorists that callously use civilians as human shields. If calm prevails in any particular area, improvements are implemented there independently of other areas. In addition, Israel is working with the donor community and United Nations agencies on mechanisms to optimize and facilitate humanitarian activities, access

and movement under the present security circumstances. That effort is noted in the Secretary-General's report.

On 25 May 2003, with the adoption of the road map, the Government of Israel immediately began to implement measures meant to ease conditions for the Palestinian population, in anticipation of the Palestinian Authority's fulfilment of its primary road map obligation — to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure.

Those Israeli steps included the following: the transfer of Israeli security responsibility to the Palestinian Authority in Gaza, and the withdrawal of its forces from that area; authorization for 40,000 Palestinian workers and merchants to enter Israel daily from the West Bank and Gaza in order to strengthen the Palestinian economy; the authorization of the daily employment of an additional 15,000 workers in the special industrial parks located between Israel and the Palestinian Authority areas, giving a further boost to the Palestinian economy; the opening of shipping terminals allowing daily access for about 2,000 trucks carrying merchandise, produce and raw materials into and out of the West Bank and Gaza from Israel, Jordan and Egypt; the authorization of tourist entry into Bethlehem and Jericho, important sources of income for the Palestinian economy; the elimination of roadblocks and checkpoints throughout the West Bank and Gaza in order to improve freedom of movement for the Palestinian population; and the extension of the Palestinian fishing zone out to 12 miles from the Gaza coast in order to strengthen that key economic sector.

Unfortunately, the Palestinian Authority, for its part, did nothing to fulfil its road map obligation to fight the terrorist organizations, and terrorists used every Israeli attempt to ease conditions of Palestinian daily life as an opportunity to renew their attacks on Israeli citizens. They took advantage of the increased freedom of movement to smuggle weapons between villages and cities, they exploited this freedom of movement to smuggle fugitives, arms, mortar bombs, artillery rockets and even suicide belts between villages and cities and they exploited workers' passage into Israel to infiltrate Israeli cities and carry out suicide attacks.

Although Israel experienced numerous fatal terrorist attacks and smaller scale suicide bombings, it continued its policy of easing conditions for Palestinians until 19 August when a suicide bomber, taking advantage of Israel's economic gestures to the Palestinians, infiltrated Jerusalem and detonated himself on a city bus, killing 23 people, including 6 children and infants, and wounding over 130. Needless to say, Israel was left with no choice but to again implement the security measures that are necessary to protect its population.

This illustrates that the unfortunate condition of the local civilian population is due, more than any other factor, to the terrorists themselves and to the Palestinian Authority which, despite its road map obligations, allows terrorists free rein. This terrorism hurts Israelis and Palestinians alike; an end to this situation is dependent, first and foremost, upon an end to violence and terrorism.

Consequently, the Palestinian claim, made here today, that the economic and humanitarian plight of the Palestinians is due to Israeli security measures ignores the connection between cause and effect. If there were no terrorism, there would be no need for tightened security and none of the negative economic and humanitarian effects that it engenders.

If the concern of the Palestinian observer for the population in the territories is sincere, then he should be confronting the terrorist organizations operating within the areas of the Palestinian Authority and stopping their violence, rather than blaming Israel for having to protect itself.

At the end of the day, the welfare and safety of both Palestinian and Israeli peoples is inextricably tied to the fulfilment, once and for all, of the Palestinian obligation to fight and dismantle terrorism, in accordance with international law, United Nations resolutions and the road map. It is this that would obviate the need for Israeli security measures and pave the way for peaceful negotiations, based on mutual recognition and mutual compromise, which are the true guarantee of the welfare, prosperity and security of the peoples of the region.

Mr. Zenna (Ethiopia): The Ethiopian delegation would like to convey its thanks to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on agenda item 40 (b), regarding emergency humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia. My delegation associates itself with the statement made by Morocco, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. We would like to welcome Mr. Jan Egeland, the newly appointed United Nations Under-

Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs. Our appreciation also goes to his predecessor, Mr. Kenzo Oshima, and the organization he led, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for a job well done during these trying years.

Recurrent droughts have affected Ethiopia during the last 30 years, but their severity and duration varied. The droughts that affected the country in the early seventies and mid-eighties caused enormous human suffering and deaths. During the last ten years, there have been droughts three to four years out of ten. During this time, the prevalence and area coverage of drought increased sharply, but deaths caused by famine and human suffering were checked.

In terms of area coverage and the number of people affected, the drought that affected the country during 2002-2003 is more severe than any the country faced before it. The multi-agency assessment team estimated that a total of 13.2 million people, or some 20 per cent of the population, were at risk beginning January 2003. Their food needs were estimated at 1.4 million tons.

Supporting such a large number of people has been possible because of the Government's Emergency Food Security Reserve, which is designed to cover emergency requirements of food for approximately four months for some 4 to 5 million people. Further more, the credible early warning system and advocacy by the Government, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, donor representatives and the media, coupled with timely and generous responses by donors, averted unprecedented human suffering.

Allow me at this juncture to thank all those who extended a helping hand, specifically the United States, the European Union and the various United Nations agencies, funds and programmes.

I would also like to thank His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan for the commitment and interest he has shown by appointing a personal representative to advise him in finding lasting solutions for the problem in the region.

Relief support to save the lives of millions of affected people is a noble act. But it will not solve the basic problems that make Ethiopians susceptible to recurrent drought. In the long run, the most important step is to strengthen the capacity of countries like Ethiopia to grow more. The pivotal point here is to link relief to development and, as stated by Secretary-General Kofi Annan, to create a second Green Revolution in Africa. That way we can mitigate poverty and effectively avert the hunger and malnutrition that haunt the continent.

By the same token, when he launched the Millennium Challenge Account initiative, President Bush emphasized that the account may be used to "increase harvest where hunger is greatest". We hope that these just words will be realized soon. The European Union has also long engaged itself in the search for long-term and lasting solutions for the food security problem in Ethiopia. The Union has committed itself through budget support and the Cotonou Agreement financial allocations. We are grateful for such useful supports.

In order to mitigate the effects of recurrent drought and to ensure food security in the short term, the Ethiopian Government is taking measures such as water harvesting, resettlement, conservation based agriculture, improving livestock production and marketing. The resettlement programme the Government is undertaking tries to avoid as much as possible the associated economic and social problems. The present resettlement programme is fully voluntary and avoids mixing of peoples of different cultures and languages in order to minimize any social problems that might crop up between the settlers and local population. To mitigate problems associated with competition for resources between settlers and local populations, the programme is planned and executed at the grass-roots level with the full participation of the people.

Realizing that mere economic growth or an increase in agricultural productivity will not eliminate food deficiency, the Government has focused on poverty eradication policies. To this effect, the country's sustainable development and poverty-reduction programme has been built on agriculture-led industrialization and food security, against the backdrop of justice system and civil service reform, good governance, decentralization and empowerment, as well as capacity-building.

Ethiopia's food security strategy aims to address both the supply and demand sides of the food equation: availability and entitlement. This could be achieved by ensuring food security at both national and household

levels. The strategy is targeted mainly at chronically food-insecure, moisture-deficit and pastoral areas.

Finally, while expressing our thanks and appreciation to the international community for its timely and generous humanitarian assistance to the drought-affected people of Ethiopia, I appeal to it to help the Government in its endeavour to eliminate the root causes of poverty and famine.

Mr. Taha (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his valuable report (A/58/225) submitted under agenda item 40 (b) and to express appreciation for the efforts made by the United Nations and other international organizations that are part of the United Nations family. We would also like to thank all of the brotherly and friendly countries that have continued to provide us with assistance, particularly during and before the period covered by the report — a period during which the Sudan had to face a great many problems resulting from natural and other causes.

My Government's desire for peace throughout the territory of the Sudan is absolute. Anybody involved in the peace process will be aware that the Government has spared no effort in its attempt to achieve peace and put an end to war, so as to make it possible for us to effectively mobilize our efforts and use our many resources for the well-being and development of our population, as well as to provide assistance and support to regional organizations for development throughout the entire region.

Considerable progress has been made this year towards achieving peace in the Sudan. Indeed, we have almost achieved our objective. I believe that the ongoing talks in Kenya will be the last round of talks and we will finally put an end to the longest civil war on the African continent.

I feel able to say, in a spirit of optimism, that the necessary foundation for the achievement of progress in reaching a final agreement seems to have been established. We believe that the great encouragement and positive response that we have received from the international community, as reflected in the statements that we have heard from a number of countries and regional organizations in this Hall, will allay the fears of States and organizations regarding our ability to begin a new chapter in our history.

Preserving the peace requires even greater effort and resolve than actually achieving peace in the first place. We would like to associate ourselves with the conclusions of the Secretary-General in his report, in particular those regarding the dire and urgent need to preserve security and to create social institutions after peace has been achieved. We would also like to associate ourselves with the comments expressed in paragraph 103 of the report, which indicates that assistance partners must act urgently to create mechanisms to consolidate the foundations of any negotiated peace.

We have elaborated a number of plans and strategies for the post-conflict period. In this connection, I would like to refer to the funds that have been set up or are being set up to assist in reconstruction in the south, whether under the auspices of the League of Arab States or other parties. A fund was also set up at the Islamic Summit meeting recently held in Malaysia with a view to supporting reconstruction in the south.

At the national level, the Government of Sudan has set up a fund for the reconstruction of the south and other war-stricken areas. That fund has now moved beyond the stage of planning, strategy and needs and has begun to mobilize assistance. We hope that the United Nations and the specialized agencies will also be involved in the reconstruction effort, because their commitment will indeed make it possible for reconstruction and for consolidating the foundations of peace.

Mr. Amirbayov (Azerbaijan): The strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations is an issue that is of great importance from our national perspective as a matter of principle.

Experience during the past decade proves that the effective and timely distribution of emergency humanitarian assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons suffering in various ongoing conflicts throughout the world depends on the availability of international, regional and local resources. Tackling this challenge is far beyond the capacity of individual States or organizations and requires a collective response on the part of major actors at all levels. Furthermore, it necessitates effective coordination among an increased number of humanitarian actors in the field — actors with different

kinds of expertise, mandates and resources — and their collaboration with local authorities. As a natural part of any humanitarian effort, the local authorities, in their turn, must ensure safe and unhindered functioning of humanitarian personnel acting in the field.

While fully understanding that primary responsibility for a solution to the problem of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) rests with the countries concerned, one can hardly disregard the fact that national efforts to that end may not necessarily be similar from country to country. The substance and quality of these efforts would certainly differ, depending on factors such as the security and development situation of a country, availability of extrabudgetary resources and a country's experience in handling refugee situations.

This is particularly evident in situations where countries suffer from the consequences of protracted conflict. Azerbaijan, a small developing country with an economy in transition and a total population of 8 million, has for 15 years been home to 1 million refugees and internally displaced persons as a result of the armed aggression and continuing occupation by Armenia of Azerbaijan's territories.

Ten years have passed since both the Security Council, in its four resolutions 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993) and 884 (1993), and the General Assembly, in its resolution 48/114, entitled "Emergency international assistance to refugees and displaced persons in Azerbaijan", adopted at the forty-eighth session, expressed their grave concern at the humanitarian situation in Azerbaijan and appealed to all States and organizations to provide adequate and sufficient financial, medical and material assistance to the refugees and IDPs in my country. On behalf of these people I would like to thank all those who provided and continue to provide much needed humanitarian assistance to this vulnerable group of people.

However, despite the contributions of donors and the activities of relevant humanitarian actors, the protracted character of this armed conflict and the lack of progress towards a settlement have had a negative impact on the situation of refugees and IDPs in Azerbaijan. Due to insufficient funding and a shortage of humanitarian assistance we are seeking possible ways to offer immediate responses to the current demands of refugees and IDPs, although the long-term resolution of this problem is inevitably linked to settlement of the conflict and the return of refugees and IDPs to their places of origin.

The decreasing volume of humanitarian assistance accompanied by the departure of foreign aid agencies which have assisted with the provision of food and materials to refugee camps for the past decade, has caused despair and frustration — in the first place, among the affected population. Massive economic transformation and restricted financial resources have curtailed the capacity of Azerbaijan to provide basic social services for refugees and IDPs. Currently, the volume of humanitarian assistance does not cover the most pressing needs of this fragile part of our society.

Nevertheless, the Government of Azerbaijan, using its limited resources, spares no effort to mitigate the suffering of the affected population, and has recently made a further allocation of more than $70 million to the construction of housing for refugees. However, being stuck in a situation of "no war, no peace" in its conflict with Armenia, and confused in the transition from relief to development, Azerbaijan must nevertheless keep up with the demands of its refugees and internally displaced persons. Another issue is that the United Nations and its institutions acting in Azerbaijan, having shifted from the phase of emergency humanitarian assistance to the stage of development, do not adequately respond to the estimated needs. This is a situation where a clear-cut balance should be struck between the delivery of emergency humanitarian assistance and activities for recovery and development. In our view, correctly proportioned assistance, applied in the right place at the right time, requires the integration of Government into the planning and coordination phases from the very start so that Government can effectively integrate its own resources with those provided by the international community.

In our particular case, Azerbaijani concerns stemming from the premature application of the stage of transition from relief to development, a stage which is more relevant to the post-conflict rehabilitation stage, must be addressed, including with respect to our concern to ensure the sustainability of the return of the refugees and internally displaced persons to their native lands. Effective transition from relief to development in the situation of a protracted conflict should envisage continuation of the delivery of

emergency humanitarian assistance during the initial stages of transition. Moreover, development-related projects ought not to be carried out at the expense of emergency humanitarian assistance.

The role of United Nations country teams led by Resident Coordinators should be of primary importance for the definition and formulation of coherent, flexible strategies based on the specifics of the country concerned and the availability of resources. In that context, we agree with the proposal put forward in the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening the coordination of humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (A/58/89), on the basis of the observation that the effective transfer from the usual humanitarian assistance coordination system to that of United Nations Resident Coordinators, which would maintain appropriate levels of capacity and support during emergencies and transition, will be possible only if the Resident Coordinator system is strengthened. More flexibility in utilizing existing financial resources would allow the Resident Coordinators to carry out more efficiently the assessment and consequent financing of humanitarian needs.

Effective and timely United Nations assistance to mitigate the humanitarian situation is a key factor in ensuring protection of the civilian population during armed conflict. I would like to hope that our deliberations today will pave the way, if not for progress in bringing such conflicts to an end, then at least for a clearer definition and understanding of what should constitute a humanitarian response that is sufficient to adequately meet the needs of refugees and displaced persons.

Mr. Sow (Guinea) (*spoke in French*): My delegation is grateful to the Secretary-General for his reports on strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance. We support the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The importance of humanitarian issues resulting from conflicts, natural disasters and epidemics has prompted the Assembly to adopt, inter alia, resolution 46/182, which emphasizes what is at stake and proposes solutions. In the same context, the Millennium Declaration (resolution 55/2) and the Brahimi report (A/55/305) took a detailed and instructive approach to this question. Since then, a great deal of experience has been gained. Those involved in emergency situation management have constantly combined their efforts in order to make humanitarian action more operational.

Analysis of the reports before us, which describe in detail the problems under consideration, leads my delegation to say that the record of developments in the humanitarian situation in the past year is uneven. This is due, on the one hand, to the upsurge of conflicts and disasters in some parts of the world and, on the other hand, to their mitigation in other parts of the world, making concerted solutions necessary among the actors involved at the international, regional, subregional and national levels.

The diversity of actors in the humanitarian field and the multidimensional nature of the questions to be resolved require coordination and close collaboration between the General Assembly and other United Nations organs and agencies on the one hand, and the other actors involved on the other. This also presupposes a concise definition of humanitarian aid with a view to focusing its mandate and operations on what is essential.

My delegation acknowledges the primary responsibility of States in the protection of civilians. However, one must not underestimate the responsibility of other actors, especially those in conflict. We welcome the organization of regional workshops on the issue, as reflected in paragraph 10 of the report, and we hope that the conclusions of such workshops will be broadly disseminated. We believe that the Secretary-General's recommendations contained in the three reports on the subject will help to further guide the international community's activities. The aide-mémoire and the road map now being finalized will also be of great usefulness.

We appreciate the interest aroused by the safety and security of United Nations personnel, associated personnel and personnel of humanitarian organizations. In that context, the Security Council's recent adoption of resolution 1502 (2003) strengthens the instruments in force; it is incumbent on the international community to ensure their implementation.

The issue of the relationship between humanitarian and military personnel deserves attention. We appreciate the provisions prepared by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and hope that

they will enable us to find appropriate solutions in that regard.

With respect to refugees and displaced persons, it is useful to emphasize the large numbers involved and to note that, despite the issue's general nature, it is appropriate to take a case-by-case approach, which would permit the sharing of experiences within the framework of a comparative advantage approach. Thus the Angolan experience, as described in paragraph 15, is worth sharing.

My delegation welcomes the IASC's consideration of issues related to vulnerable persons — particularly women — and to exploitation and sexual violence in humanitarian crisis situations. We believe that the IASC's elaboration of a series of policies, strategies and guidelines aimed at ensuring systematic consideration of women's priorities, experiences and particular needs and the adoption of an action plan for protection against exploitation and sexual violence in humanitarian crisis situations, developed by the working group on the problem, will contribute to a better understanding of those phenomena with a view to finding appropriate solutions.

In order to ensure that humanitarian action is operational, we should strengthen coordination and cooperation among all humanitarian actors, particularly public and civil society actors. In that connection, we welcome the ongoing initiatives of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs with the United Nations Development Programme, on the one hand, and with the United Nations Environment Programme, on the other, in the framework of global disaster management and an international partnership on an integrated approach to prevention, preparation and interventions in urgent environmental situations with a view to promoting sustainable development.

We appreciate the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General in Southern African and the Horn of Africa, which have enabled us to alleviate the devastating effects of the drought and HIV/AIDS and to undertake adequate measures. We encourage the IASC to complete the guidelines on organizing emergency interventions to ensure the integration of elements related to HIV/AIDS into all relevant planning fields, so as to facilitate global anti-HIV/AIDS action in humanitarian crises.

Furthermore, we note with concern the considerations affecting the financing of humanitarian activities, as described in the report. The three issues of the sufficiency of humanitarian aid, its equitable distribution and its effective management are more topical than ever. We are also concerned about the increase in the volume of activities that parallels a decline in official development assistance. The provisions of paragraph 11 of the annex to resolution 46/182 should continue to guide donors' activities aimed at dealing with that problem.

My delegation shares the observations made in the report on the financing issue. We reaffirm that, given the interests at stake, the allocation of resources must be based on needs in order to avoid undertaking disparate activities with limited capacity to intervene. In addition, donors will have to show greater confidence in the United Nations coordination system and facilitate the establishment of mechanisms that will enable it to demonstrate greater flexibility, by increasing the amount of resources that are not reserved for specific use in emergency situations.

As the Assembly may note, my delegation's interest in the item under consideration results from the situation of Africa in general and the West African subregion in particular, where natural disasters and especially conflicts have occurred in recent years. My country, Guinea — which borders on countries of the subregion that are in a post-conflict situation — has suffered humanitarian and other types of consequences. The prolonged presence of refugees and the displacement of persons within the country after the rebel attacks of 2000 have affected the socio-cultural infrastructure and diverted funds initially intended for development programmes.

The Government of Guinea, mindful of its international commitments and faithful to its African humanitarian tradition, has not only agreed to make enormous efforts to contain that situation's effects but has also participated with other actors of the international community — most particularly those of the subregion — in efforts to restore security, peace and stability in the subregion in general and more particularly in the countries affected by the conflicts. In the light of our experience, my delegation attaches sustained importance to the issue of the capacity to coordinate humanitarian operations and the establishment of new competences related to the principal aspects of transition: peace-building, socio-economic recovery and re-establishment of the institutions of civil administration and of Government.

I cannot conclude without highlighting the importance of preventing natural disasters and conflicts. In that regard, we welcome the existing structures — particularly the early-warning instruments and means of United Nations departments and bodies and the Economic and Social Council's Ad Hoc Advisory Group on African Countries Emerging from Conflict, as well as the Security Council's Ad Hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa, whose activities deserve to be supported. We should also devote attention to the recommendations made by the Secretary-General in his report on prevention of armed conflict (A/55/985). Finally, we hope that the second World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction, to be held in Kobe, Japan, from 18 to 22 January 2005, will serve as an opportunity to meet countries' expectations and needs, given the negative effects of such disasters.

Mr. Šahović (Serbia and Montenegro): At the outset, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for the comprehensive and informative reports submitted under the agenda item under consideration.

The reports clearly indicate that humanitarian operations are becoming more complex and larger, both in scale and number. At the same time, the work of the humanitarian personnel all over the world is becoming increasingly dangerous, and is being carried out under extremely difficult conditions. The tragic event that took place on 19 August of this year in Baghdad is the latest demonstration of the serious, and indeed deadly, threats to the safety and security of United Nations personnel. Obviously, a strengthened and unified security management system for the United Nations is needed, as stated in the report contained in document A/58/344. Humanitarian staff need to operate in as secure and safe an environment as possible in order to deliver assistance successfully.

We believe that the ultimate goal of humanitarian assistance in post-conflict situations is to ensure that durable solutions are found, thereby setting the stage for sustainable development. As recognized in resolution 2003/5 of the Economic and Social Council, it is of critical importance for the successful management of transition from relief to development that more support is given to recovery and long-term development activities, capacity-building at all relevant levels and the enhancement of national ownership. The issue of transition from relief to development should be further considered in an integrated manner, with a view to better understanding the implications of that process while working out the programmes of humanitarian and development organizations.

From our experience as a country receiving humanitarian assistance, and as indicated in the Secretary-General's report contained in document A/58/89, we know that coordination in the context of the transition from relief to development is a demanding and time-critical process that requires the full engagement of Governments and donors at the early stages. The process of coordination among providers, and between providers and recipients of assistance, should be constantly reviewed and adjusted to the real needs in the field to make it more efficient and avoid competition, overlapping and duplication of activities. In order to improve coherence and to give clear, consolidated and timely guidance to the United Nations system, we fully support the establishment of the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Development Group Joint Working Group on Transition Issues.

I would like to focus in particular on document A/58/358, entitled "Economic assistance to the Eastern European States affected by the developments in the Balkans". The report contains a comprehensive review regarding economic assistance provided, especially to the countries of South-Eastern Europe. The report also attests to the seriousness of the economic problems that those States, including mine, are confronting.

As stated in the report, few countries in the region have managed to embark on a path of sustained growth, and many of them still face macro-economic stabilization problems and are lagging in the process of integration into the European economy. We therefore fully agree with the conclusions in the report that continued donor support, the participation of regional organizations and the involvement of the private sector will be essential for reconstruction, stabilization and development in the Balkans.

In that regard, regional cooperation mechanisms are of key importance. The Thessaloniki agenda for the Western Balkans, which is referred to in the report, represents a significant step forward in the relationship between the European Union and the region. Its implementation should, inter alia, facilitate and accelerate our transition from relief to development. The activities of other regional actors, such as the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, the European

Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the European Investment Bank and other partners are also very important. They have a leading role to play in areas such as the rebuilding of infrastructure, promoting the private sector and attracting much-needed investment.

Serbia and Montenegro is profoundly restructuring its economy. In doing so it is mobilizing its internal resources to overcome its dire starting position and to reform rapidly. Our aim is to complete the relief-to-development process and to implement development policies that promote durable solutions and strengthen national capacities to meet the basic needs of the most vulnerable. The ongoing reform and recovery programme is painful. It is also coupled with some negative effects that include, for example, rising unemployment and increased costs in basic services, which affect many segments of society.

Now that the difficult task of reconstruction is underway, resources tend to be scarce. Unfortunately, humanitarian assistance is decreasing due to a shift in donor funding to emergencies in other parts of the world. However, humanitarian assistance is still needed to address widespread poverty, fragile basic services and the needs of one of the largest displaced populations in Europe, namely, the over 380,000 refugees from the former Yugoslavia and the approximately 260,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs), most of whom are from Kosovo and Metohija. Of special importance to us is the assistance, financial and otherwise, of Member States and international intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations in the implementation of our national strategy to resolve the problems of refugees and internally displaced persons. That national strategy, which has been integrated into the overall development strategy and reform programme of the country, reaffirms our commitment to find durable solutions to the problems of refugees and IDPs. Serbia and Montenegro is also cooperating bilaterally and regionally with neighbouring countries to comprehensively address the plight of refugees.

As for IDPs, we welcome the fact that the IDP Unit of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is operational, reflecting the need to solve the complex problems of a growing number of IDPs. In that context, we would like to point to the specific nature of the problem of IDPs in Serbia and Montenegro. We call upon the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo to enhance its efforts to fulfil the obligations stemming from Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) and to create the necessary conditions for the safe return of IDPs.

The transition from relief to development in my country has also had an impact on the work of the programmes and agencies of the United Nations. Humanitarian coordination, under the Resident Coordinator appointed last year, is aimed at strengthening the links between United Nations agencies and programmes and the national authorities, as well between relevant regional and other development organizations. For our part, we will continue to make efforts to further improve cooperation and coordination in order to enable that mechanism to address actual needs even more effectively. We highly appreciate the engagement of the United Nations system, including that of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund and the international financial institutions that have continued to assist our country. However, their further input will be necessary.

Finally, allow me to take this opportunity to express our appreciation for the humanitarian assistance rendered to my country over the past few years by a number of States referred to in the report contained in document A/58/358, in particular by major contributors such as the European Union and international relief agencies and organizations.

Mr. Musambachime (Zambia): At the outset, I would like to commend the Secretary-General for the very comprehensive and concise report contained in document A/58/89, which has been submitted under this agenda item. The report refers to issues pertinent to my country.

The Secretary-General's report has ably addressed the theme of strengthening the coordination of United Nations humanitarian assistance, with particular attention to humanitarian financing, the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance and the transition from relief to development. The report also examines some of the key humanitarian developments and challenges of the past year and addresses some of the key issues related to the protection of civilians and internally displaced persons (IDP), contingency planning, natural disasters and HIV in the context of emergencies.

We welcome the proposals in the report which, among other things, stress the need for increased national and regional capacity-building in the early warning and monitoring of natural hazards, and natural disaster preparedness, mitigation and response by strengthening coordination in the areas of information-sharing and analysis, logistical support, response coordination and the strengthening of relationships with existing regional structures.

Earlier this month, when my delegation spoke at the meeting to discuss the southern African crisis and the related consolidated appeals, which were launched by the United Nations, I took the opportunity to thank the United Nations and its partners, particularly the World Food Programme, for coming to the aid of Southern Africa, including Zambia during the period 2002-2003, thus preventing the famine and mass starvation that would have ensued had it not been for such prompt intervention.

My delegation expresses deep appreciation for the several visits made by Mr. Oshima, former Under-Secretary-General in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. We also welcome his successor, Mr. Jan Egeland, and promise our support and cooperation. My delegation also appreciated the visits made to Zambia by Mr. James Morris, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the humanitarian situation in southern Africa. We commend him and his team for their commitment and personal efforts to help the plight of Zambians and others in the Southern African region. During his recent visit to Zambia, Mr. Morris, together with Ms. Machel, met with the President of the Republic of Zambia, Mr. Mwanawasa, and several key ministers, as well as a cross-section of policy-makers and experts on the impact that the HIV pandemic is having on Zambia. The Government is studying the recommendations made, with a view to taking appropriate action.

During the 2001-2002 agricultural season, in response to the food deficit resulting from the drought, the Government put in place a number of meas designed to promote agricultural production enhance food security. These included, first importation of some 200,000 tons of maize; secon the provision of relief food to needy areas; thirdly, introduction of the Food Security Pack program aimed at empowering vulnerable farmers with i credit, and fourthly, the early distribution of fertil by the Food Reserve Agency. As a result of t measures, Zambia produced a higher yield last se than in the previous five years. My Governmen determined to continue with that programme.

In conclusion, my delegation wishes to note while major successes have been recorded in both agricultural and social sectors, the HIV pandemi exacerbating the situation. The disease attacks the productive members of society — those who are i agricultural sector and are concerned with production. This has resulted in millions of orph children, widows and elderly people living in a poverty. It is the vulnerable members of our so who need us to ensure that they have access to basic health, water, sanitation and affordable ge drugs to treat or prevent HIV/AIDS. Such attention go a long way towards reversing that hu catastrophe.

I wish to appeal to the Secretary-General, thr the Office for the Coordination of Humanit Affairs, to increase support to Zambia and countries in the region in further enhancing security.

I would like to commend the efforts of the U Nations and the international community for assi Zambia at a time of humanitarian crisis. My co will continue to look to them for support.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.